Saladin

A. R. Azzam

Like Alexander or Caesar, the name of Saladin carries a timeless quality. As famous today as he was when he drove the Crusaders out of Jerusalem, the historical Saladin has dissolved into legend with each generation's retelling of his story. Dante placed him in the first circle of Hell with the heroes of Troy and Rome; Rex Harrison played him as a cad in the film *King Richard and the Crusaders*. In Youssef Chahine's epic film *Saladin*, he emerged as a hero of Arab socialism, and he has even made an appearance in an episode of *Dr Who*. Today, Saladin's name continues to resonate with Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gaddafi all, at one stage, claiming to be his military and spiritual heir.

But who was the real Saladin? To answer this question, A. R. Azzam argues, it is essential to appreciate the age Saladin lived in. The Islamic world had been completely transformed by the Sunni Revival in the 10th and 11th centuries, the great intellectual renaissance, which integrated the different strands of Islamic thought under one orthodox umbrella. Saladin was a child of the Sunni Revival and the movement was key to his extraordinary success – as it is to any consideration of the background of today's Middle East. In that sense, Saladin's true greatness, Azzam contends, lay not on the battlefield, as has commonly been accepted, but in his spiritual and political vision. An honest and guileless leader, Saladin baffled his enemies by refusing to play their political games and succeeded in uniting an army from all parts of the Muslim world. Although he was an outsider he managed – almost seamlessly – to become the most powerful man in Islam.

The first major biography of Saladin for twenty years, A. R. Azzam's timely and fascinating account is essential reading for anyone interested in the medieval Crusades, Islamic history and the origins of the modern Middle East.

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Dr A.R. Azzam

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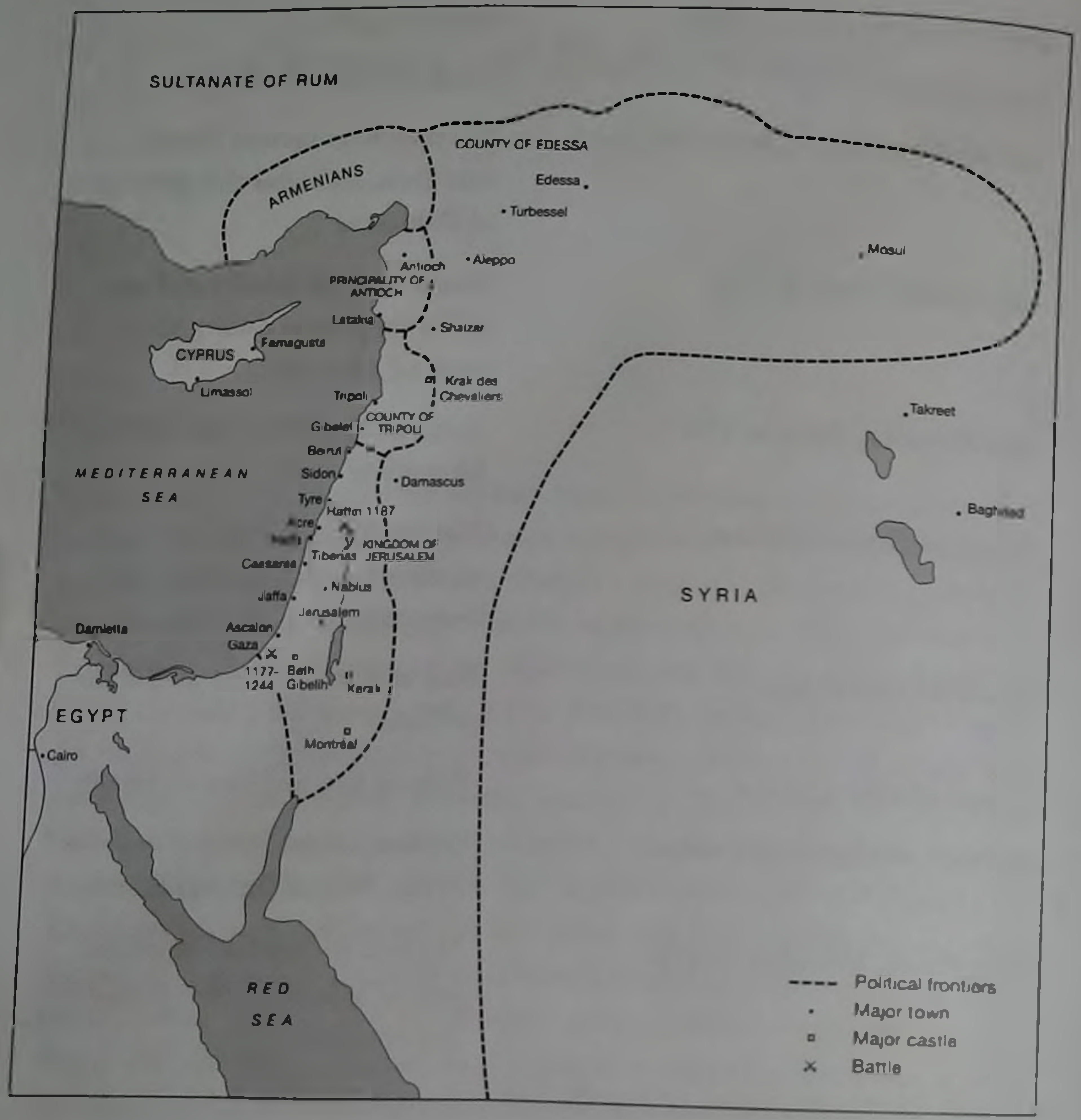
Glossary of Main Names

Since some of the Muslim names can appear confusing and repetitive, this is a brief glossary which is by no means comprehensive but which attempts to distinguish between the names. Names which are distinctive and over which there can be no confusion (al-Khabushani for example) are omitted. In addition, the full names of the individuals are not included (Saladin's brother al-Adil's full name is Saif al-Din Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Ayyub) since the main aim of the glossary is an *aide-memoire*, and the listing of the full name can add, rather than alleviate, confusion. The names of the most famous characters have also been simplified so, for example, throughout the name Zengi is used to refer to Nur al-Din's father and the founder of the Zengid dynasty. Although his full name was Imad al-Din Zengi, this was also the name of Nur al-Din's nephew and ruler of Sinjar. Similarly, Nur al-Din's other nephew Saif al-Din (the ruler of Mosul) was named after Nur al-Din's brother, Mawdud. So it is important not to confuse Saif al-Din ibn Mawdud ibn Zengi (Nur al-Din's nephew) with Saif al-Din ibn Zengi (Nur al-Din's brother). It is precisely to avoid such confusions that the names have been simplified as much as possible.

Al-Adil, al-Malik al-Adil	Brother of Saladin
Al-Afdal, al-Malik al-Afdal	Saladin's eldest son
Al-Qadi al-Fadil	Head of Saladin's chancery and one of his closest advisers
Al-Salih ibn Nur al-Din	Son and successor of Nur al-Din
Al-Zahir, Abu Mansur Ghazi	Saladin's son and his favourite
Ayyub, Najm al-Din ibn Shadi	Saladin's father

Farrukh-Shah, Izzal al-Din	Saladin's nephew
Ibn al-Athir	Mosuli historian of Saladin
Ibn al-Muqaddam, Shams al-Din	The man who invited Saladin into Syria, and later the governor of Damascus
Ibn Masal, Najm al-Din	Companion of Saladin and one of his supporters during the siege of Alexandria
Ibn Shaddad, Baha ul-Din	Judge of Saladin's army and his biographer
Imad al-Din al-Isfahani	Nur al-Din and Saladin's secretary, and biographer of both men
Imad al-Din Zengi	Nur al-Din's nephew and ruler of Sinjar
Ismat al-Din Khatun	Wife of Nur al-Din and Saladin
Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri	Scholar, counsellor and qadi for Zengi, Nur al-Din and Saladin
Keukburi, Muzaffar al-Din	Married to Saladin's sister and one of Saladin's senior military commanders
Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Shirkuh	Son of Shirkuh
Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri	Religious scholar and Saladin's teacher
Saif al-Din Ghazi	Nur al-Din's nephew and ruler of Mosul
Shirkuh, Asad al-Din ibn Shadi	Saladin's uncle and vizier of Egypt
Taqi ul-Din al-Malik al-Muzaffar	Nephew of Saladin and one of his most trusted generals
Turan Shah, al-Malik al-Muazzam	Saladin's brother



The Kingdom of Jerusalem. 1099–1187

Prologue

Separating the Man from the Myth

What is true in a man's life is not what he does, but the legend which grows up around him.

Oscar Wilde

To understand the man we first must confront the legend. No historian can approach the task of writing about Saladin without first having to confront, acknowledge and ultimately dismiss the multitude of stories which have, over the centuries, enraptured readers but which have equally blurred the line between legend and evidence. This task, noble in intent, onerous to implement, is complicated by one simple fact: people prefer the legend. I was struck by this fact while researching and writing this book. Whether I was in company of Muslims or non-Muslims, as soon as people found out about the subject of my book, I was regaled by anecdotes about Saladin. What was striking about those stories and anecdotes was that they were more often than not historically impossible, geographically improbable and factually inconceivable. At first with the zealousness of a new biographer I attempted to correct them; no, Saladin did not meet Richard, and no, he could not have had an affair with Richard's mother. But to my initial amazement and subsequent amusement I discovered that my comments were neither accepted nor welcome. But then again I myself had once fallen

in love with a fable. My first memory of Saladin was from a Ladybird book which, as a child, I had read and reread. One drawing had stood out in particular: Saladin and Richard were standing side by side, and both men were demonstrating their strength. Richard struck an iron bar with tremendous force with his sword and the bar broke in two. Saladin, in return, threw a silk scarf in the air then gently sliced it as it landed. Years later I discovered that the two had never met, but the legend had served a purpose and an apocryphal story had captured my imagination and drawn me to search for a deeper historical truth.

The liberator of Jerusalem, a chivalrous knight, a generous benefactor, a political upstart – the character of Saladin has undergone so many transformations as each generation created him in its image. Lane-Poole saw Saladin's chivalry towards the Christians as the 'good breeding of a gentleman',[1] while Dante placed him in the first circle of Hell with the heroes of Troy and Rome. Rex Harrison played him as a cad, while, in Yusuf Chachine's 1963 epic film, he emerges as a hero of Arab socialism. Nothing, it seems, was spared, as Saladin even makes an appearance in a Dr Who television episode. The case of a military commander having his name used both for a battalion of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's army and for a battle tank of the British army is surely unique in history.[2] So many Saladins. And even more tumble out of the drawers of history as we delve deeper through the centuries. A multitude of Saladins: chivalrous, patient, generous, cruel. There is, it seems, a Saladin story to illuminate every sin to be found in the human soul, and for every virtue there are two. That these fables bear no link to the historical character is irrelevant; Saladin was too valuable to be left to the historians. But Saladin did exist, and for the historian such fables are irrelevant, at most a nuisance. And yet, such is the number of sightings of Saladin's name in literature, art and popular media that it would be careless not to ask why. Why so many stories?

Within months of his victory at Hattin and his conquest of Jerusalem, poems were being written in the West about Saladin. One particular anonymous poem composed in 1187 represents as contemporary a Western view as possible. Focusing on Saladin's rise to power, it is unsparing in its vitriol. Saladin is illegitimate, of low rank, who rose to power by raping his master's wife and then took over Egypt by poisoning his master, Nur al-Din.[3] This portrayal of Saladin is far away from the more familiar chivalrous one, with good reason. In 1187 Saladin was still alive and posed not just a formidable

military threat but an ideological one. In 1187 the West was confronted by an enemy with an equally persuasive claim to the sacred and whose victories on the battlefield seemed, to the baffled Christians, to validate this claim. Could God really be on the side of the infidel? The loss of Jerusalem was a tremendous blow and one that had to be rationalised. In July 1187, for example, a letter from several German princes reached Emperor Frederick Barbarossa informing him of the calamity of Hattin but also relating to him how contemptuous Saladin was of the Christian religion. In one story Saladin, having captured the Holy Cross, flung it into an open fire, only for it to emerge unscathed. In all these accounts the aim was to garner support for another crusade. It was at this time that Henry II imposed the famous Saladin tithe on his subjects as a means to raise money. One of the things to be taxed was beer which, given the English fondness for the drink, must have made Saladin even more unpopular.

Gradually, however, there began to emerge a different perception of Saladin. This was largely due to the oral accounts of those returning home. The dominating theme was Saladin's generous behaviour towards the enemy. It was largely due to his generosity that Dante placed him, barely one hundred years after his death, in the first Circle of Hell. In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Saladin is obliged to borrow money from the Jew Melchisedech because he has exhausted his treasury out of generosity. In another anecdote, Jean le Long recounts how the Lord of Anglure was freed by Saladin in order to allow him to collect his ransom. When the lord however found out that his French estate was too poor to pay the ransom, he returned to Saladin with the intention of being his prisoner again. Saladin, moved by his honour, set him free on the condition that he build a mosque when he returned home. An apocryphal story? Almost certainly, but as late as 1927 a visitor to Buzancy would have come across a building, then used as a school, known as 'le Mahomet'.[4]

Saladin's religion needed to be rationalised by Christian writers and, within a century, stories began appearing hinting at Saladin's conversion to Christianity. Some even attempted to draw his ancestry to European origins. In one story, attributed to Jean Enikel who died in 1251, Saladin lay on his death-bed unable to choose between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In the *Recits d'un Menestrel de Reims*, written in 1260, Saladin, once again on his death-bed, asks for a basin of water to be brought to him with which he baptises himself.[5] So enraptured were writers by the figure of Saladin that

further embellishments were added which spoke of his fame as a lover rather than a warrior. Thus we read that during the Second Crusade, Eleanor of Aquitaine became smitten with Saladin and had to be sent home in disgrace by her husband the king. This is of course nonsense: Eleanor was in the Holy Lands when Saladin was ten years old and the story of the romance relates an alleged affair that she had with Raymond of Antioch, which caused a great scandal at the time.

Military prowess, it seems, was equally incumbent on a Christian parentage. Matthew Paris, in his *Historia Anglorum*, makes Saladin's mother English, while another common theme was that he was dubbed a Christian knight by Humphrey of Toron when the two men met in Alexandria. Other stories change the name to Hugh of Tiberius, but the story of Saladin's knighthood remained consistent up to the 1930s when, in his biography of Saladin, Rosebault devoted the entire opening chapter to the knighting incident, presenting it not as legend but as historical fact.[6] We even have stories of Saladin travelling to the West. Curious about the Christian way of life and accompanied by Hugh of Tiberius, Saladin finds himself in Paris, where he enters into a single combat with a knight to save a damsel in distress. Later, in a tournament in Cambrai, he unhorses none other than Richard in a joust. The queen of France naturally falls in love with him and (once again) he is sent home in disgrace. In *Mathilde* by Sophie Cottin, published in 1805, it is not Saladin but his brother with whom the eponymous heroine falls in love and whom he marries, though not without first converting to Christianity. And so we reach the famous visit in 1898 of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Saladin's tomb in Damascus. The little mausoleum, half hidden in a small garden, and covered by a red-ribbed dome was in such a neglected condition that the kaiser, moved by this sight, instructed that it be restored at his own expense and that his monogram be placed on a lamp hanging over the tomb. And it is perhaps in that moment, when the successor of Frederick Barbarossa paid homage to his ancestor's nemesis, that the separation between legend and the historical Saladin reached its widest point. However at this point an astute reader may ask an awkward question: why, if Saladin was such a great hero, was his tomb in such a dilapidated state?

The state of the tomb reflected a deeper truth; the fact was, for the Muslims, Saladin was neglected for many centuries. Hillenbrand writes of the 'ironically roundabout route for Muslims to take in search of their own

past',[7] and she chooses her words carefully. The Saladin whom the Muslims would raise to an almost messianic status in the twentieth century bore a far closer resemblance to nineteenth-century European popular imagination than to any historical character, and this was largely a reflection of the obsession which the West had with the Crusades; one of the few subjects, as Tyerman points out, that is the obvious exception to the rule that history is written by the victors.[8] This obsession with the Crusades was largely not shared by the Muslims, for example the Arabic term *al-Hurub al-Salibiyya* (the war of the crosses) was not used until the middle of the nineteenth century and was largely borrowed from Europe. Gradually, however, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea of parallels between European policies past and present 'crystallised in the Muslim consciousness'[9] and as the stories of his glowing reputation percolated into the Middle East, Saladin's fame grew greater among the Arabs. And so in this way, within two months of the kaiser's visit, the famous Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi responded with an ode eulogising Saladin's achievements.

It is certainly not a coincidence that the 'reintroduction' of Saladin to the Arab world was accompanied by European intervention in the region, which reopened psychological wounds that had been left dormant for many centuries. Akbar Ahmad puts his finger on this when he comments that the memory of the Crusades lingers in the Middle East and colours perceptions of Europe,[10] and Hillenbrand goes further in pointing out that the Crusades are seen through an anti-imperialist prism and the Islamic response in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is viewed as the blueprint for modern Arab and Islamic struggles for independence.[11] And so the Saladin legend grew and endures powerfully to this day. But what this legend actually says is less clear. Is it a truly potent messianic banner, acting as a balm and a ray of hope for the disillusioned and disfranchised in the Muslim world, or is it a hollow clarion call, an excuse for inaction reducing the individual, in the words of Edward Said, 'to an idle spectator waiting for another Saladin or for orders to come down from above?'[12] In his 1997 book on Pakistan, Akbar Ahmad could use the title *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity – The Search for Saladin*, and assume that his readers would automatically understand what the title implied. The assumption is a simple one, but the reality is more diverse and complex. Like the Godot character in Beckett's play, Saladin has come to represent in the Muslim consciousness a sort of political messiah, a longed-for liberator.

The scars run deep. Muslims will not forget the Crusades as long as their lands are subject to Western intervention and as long as Palestinians are obliged to react to the state of Israel. Whether Israel is the Latin Kingdom and the US intervention in the region a new crusade is of little relevance for the purpose of this book, and no amount of emotive rhetoric will make it so. The refusal to draw any comparisons does not in any way diminish the present-day struggle; however, it remains a historian's duty to insist that Saladin was a man of his age and was influenced by, and to an extent was influencing, events of his age. The Crusades were a particular phenomenon at a particular time in history which required a particular response from the Muslims. However, the raw emotions felt at the presence of Israel fan the flame of the Saladin legend and it is not a coincidence that the centuries when Jerusalem was in Muslim hands was the period when Saladin was most neglected. In the Middle East the events of the distant past have a sharp contemporary relevance.[13]

So where does this leave the historian attempting to set aside the legend and to write about the historical character? The main challenge as far as Saladin is concerned is that he became a legend during his lifetime. His capture of Jerusalem and its restoration into the Islamic fold 88 years after its capture by the crusaders transformed him into the most famous and powerful figure in the Muslim world and a symbol for the aspirations and hopes of the Muslims who, with increasing fervour, sought the restoration of the third holiest city in Islam. At the same time his acts of chivalry became magnified and retold by Europeans returning home, so adding to the legend, and all this during his lifetime. And as the stories multiplied, the historical Saladin drifted further and further into the shadows. For the historian one solution, and the one adopted in this book, in trying to draw Saladin from the shadows is to ignore the obvious. If Jerusalem and its capture gave birth to the legend then, it can be argued, by putting Jerusalem aside we can catch a glimpse of the real Saladin. Ehrenkreutz in his biography of Saladin hints at this when he asks the question of how history would have viewed Saladin had he died in 1185, two years before his capture of Jerusalem.[14] It is an intelligent question, but the conclusion that Ehrenkreutz draws is wrong. He argues that Saladin would have been no more than an unknown warlord. Ehrenkreutz confuses fame with achievement, and this book argues that in fact Saladin's greatest achievement took place before 1185, when he was still 'obscure', and that all that followed –

Jerusalem, Richard, Acre, the Third Crusade – was built on this achievement. It was Saladin's restoration of Sunni Islam into Fatimid Shiite Egypt that proved to be his greatest legacy, but to understand why this was of such fundamental importance we need to move away from the personality of Saladin and focus on the age in which he lived.

This book starts in Baghdad and with the disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate. Although at first sight this may appear to have little relevance in a biography of Saladin, a close reading of the first couple of chapters reveals the relevance. For it was in Baghdad, a century before Saladin's birth, that the spirit of the Sunni Revival was born and it was the ideals inherent in this revival, more than anything, that influenced and affected Saladin's beliefs and actions. Saladin was a child of the Sunni Revival and he was a loyal and obedient child. His subsequent fame, coupled with the West's obsession with the Crusades, has tended to obscure the fundamental point that for Saladin the restoration of Sunni orthodoxy within the Islamic fold was as important – indeed more important – than the restoration of Jerusalem. It is easy to make the assumption that having captured Jerusalem he had achieved his goal, but, as Gibb has pointed out, this goal was reached precisely because Saladin's eyes were fixed on the horizon and on a different goal.[15] The aim of this book is to discover what this goal was.

A secondary aim of this book is to throw some light on the characters who surrounded Saladin. One of the most remarkable aspects when writing about Saladin is to discover how his fame has tended to cast the achievements of all those around him into the shadows. Saladin did not capture Jerusalem single-handedly and yet I was constantly struck when writing this book by how most people struggle to name even one of Saladin's advisers or generals, even though they were instrumental in his success. And yet Saladin was surrounded by giants whose personalities and abilities certainly matched his: the great Nur al-Din who was Saladin's 'spiritual father'; his memorable uncle Shirkuh, who paved his way to success; his wise brother al-Adil, and his courageous and headstrong nephew Taqi ul-Din. Other more minor characters are scattered throughout the book and each one helps throw a different light on Saladin: the enigmatic but profound al-Hakkari; Qaraqush, the 'Turk who knows nothing about books'; the wistful Fatimid caliph al-Adid; and the brave and dashing Keukburi, the 'blue wolf'. And then there are of course the three men without him Saladin would not have been Saladin. They were the jealous guardians of his legacy

and were – apart from his close family – the nearest and dearest to him. They were his historians, propagandists and spin doctors and they were not mere scribes or witnesses to history but rather participants and contributors to it. The three were different from each other but their differences were transcended by the shared value and ideology which permeated the age in which they lived. And Saladin owed al-Qadi al-Fadil, Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and Baha ul-Din Ibn Shaddad a great debt.

Chapter 1

The Weakening of the Abbasid Caliph and the Sunni Revival

All you can claim from me is the name which is uttered from your pulpits as a means of pacifying your subjects; and if you want me to renounce that privilege too, I am prepared to do so and leave everything to you.

The Abbasid caliph al-Muti to the Buyid amir

By the mid-tenth century it had become clear that the Abbasid caliphate as a political institution had failed. The second of the two great Sunni dynasties, the Abbasids, had overthrown the Umayyad caliphate in 750 and moved the seat of power from Damascus to Baghdad, which was established as the new capital city on the west side of the Tigris river and which, until its destruction by the Mongols in 1258, would remain the most important and vibrant city in the Muslim world. Claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad's uncle Abbas Ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the Abbasid's close kinship to the Prophet had undeniably helped them gain popular support, as did their claim of reasserting the orthodox rule of Islam as opposed to what they claimed had been the Umayyad Arab secular and ethnocentric ways. For two centuries the Abbasid empire flourished, reaching a peak under the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, but gradually the decline set in and the caliph became unable to exercise religious or political authority. By the middle of the tenth century, power was assumed by provincial governors, who rapidly

founded hereditary dynasties,[1] reducing the caliph to a mere pawn in an empire of usurpers. Loss of revenue from the provinces meant loss of military authority that was needed to bring recalcitrant governors back into line, for this was an age of private armies and mercenaries where loyalty was a commodity which bowed to the highest bidder.[2] Now a lion in winter, the Abbasid caliph barely controlled the streets of his imperial city. In 945 his political authority effectively came to an end when the Buyids, a Shiite 'clan of freebooters'[3] who emerged from the province of Dailam, seized Baghdad. Allotting the Sunni caliph a humiliating pension, they reduced him to a figurehead with little authority outside his household, and placed their names on the coins and in the Friday prayer.

Disputes between Sunnis and Shiites

There were many disputes between the Sunnis and the Shiites, but ultimately there was only one, and that revolved around the nature of the caliphate. Central to the Shiite tenet was the belief that following the Prophet's death the only rightful heads of the Islamic community, the imams, were Ali (the Prophet's son-in-law), his sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and the descendants of al-Husayn through his son Zayn al-Abidin. The imams, in addition, were divinely inspired and infallible. Only they understood the inner esoteric meaning (batin) of the religion, and since they represented the fountainhead of knowledge and authority, guidance and salvation could be achieved only through them. To the Sunnis, who represented the majority of Muslims, this view was nothing short of heretical. Although they viewed the caliphate as the legitimate political institution of the community, they stressed that the caliph possessed no spiritual function connected with the esoteric interpretation of the revelation. As the guardian of the community, the caliph was not to legislate law but to administer the Sacred Law (Sharia) and act as judge in accordance with this Law.[4] For Sunnis, the unity of Islam was safeguarded not by the preservation of the caliph, but by the preservation of the Sharia, whose guardians and interpreters were the religious scholars (ulama). It was their consensus which represented the consensus of the Muslim people and constituted the foundation of Islam itself,[5] and though the caliph patronised them in order to bolster his Islamic credentials, the fact was he had no alternative but to 'toe the line'[6] set by the religious scholars. The term ulama, however, must be used with caution. As a cohesive group

of people these scholars did not emerge until a later period and, although the term is frequently used, it is rarely defined or clarified; was the possession of an Islamic education sufficient to label someone a scholar (alim), or was it necessary to have secured a high position in an institution or the judiciary? During this period the term is rarely used in the plural form and the sources refer to terms such as jurist (faqih) or mystic (sufi), indicating that the ulama were not recognised as a unit. In the words of Humphreys, it is probably easier to define what they were not, for they were neither a socio-economic class, nor a clearly defined status group, nor a hereditary caste. And yet they were the one group which made the society Islamic and not something else.[7]

By and large Shiism, destined to live in 'eternal opposition'[8] to Sunnism, remained the choice of the minority – those who were outside the main power structure. There is no doubt that by linking their name, no matter how tenuously, with the Prophet's uncle, the Abbasids had deliberately tried to win the sympathies of the Shiites, and to a large extent they were successful. Gradually, however, the followers of Ali came to view the Abbasids as usurpers. The main dilemma which confronted the Shiite dynasties which emerged during the tenth century, such as the Buyids, was that they were neither able to offset the Sunni viewpoint nor impose their Shiite views. This was mainly for two reasons: first, the majority of Muslims over whom they ruled remained indifferent to the Shiite message; and second, even if they had chosen to end the House of Abbas and replace him with that of Ali, they had no claimant or imam to produce. This effectively meant that the actions of the Buyids who now controlled Baghdad differed little, on the whole, from their Sunni counterparts, and they chose to retain the caliph, offering him a nominal loyalty and allegiance, 'so far as loyalty had any meaning',[9] and in religious ceremonies the caliph continued symbolically to wear the cloak that the Prophet wore. There was equally a politically expedient reason why the Buyids chose not to end the caliphate; if a dispute arose between the Abbasid caliph and the Buyid amir, the followers of the amir would have not hesitated to kill the caliph as they did not believe him to be the rightful claimant, but in the case of a Shiite caliph then they would have followed his orders and not those of the amir.

The Buyids may have chosen to retain the Sunni Abbasid caliph, but that did not mean they could not provoke him. Of immediate concern for the caliph were the increasingly public Shiite demonstrations encouraged by the

Buyids. What must have outraged the Sunnis in particular was the vocal denigration of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, who succeeded the Prophet and were accused of usurping Ali's claim. The Sunnis were also appalled by the celebration of Shiite festivals, such as Ghadir Khumm, which Shiites believed was when the Prophet acknowledged Ali as his successor, or the mourning for al-Husayn, Ali's son, whose slaying at Karbala was commemorated annually by the Shiites with an outpouring of wailing and grief. The Buyid emphasis on these two acts – the denigration and the commemoration – were symbolically of great importance. Whereas in the past any Sunni, as a Muslim, could accept the veneration of Ali without being labelled a Shiite, no Sunni could accept the celebration of Ghadir Khumm or the cursing of the two first caliphs without cutting himself off from his fellow Sunnis. It was during the Buyid period that Shiism defined itself as a distinct group or party; one either followed it or rejected it,[10] and Baghdad began to be divided into Sunni and Shiite quarters, each armed and defending its own areas. And not just Baghdad; the sectarian division rapidly spread to other cities, like Wasit, with conflicts frequent and violence and bloodshed common. To an extent, and as far as they could, the authorities clamped down on the outbreaks of violence. On one occasion, Abu Ali Hurmuz, sent to oversee affairs in Baghdad, and to set an example, bound one person from the Sunni and one from the Shiite side together and drowned them.

If the Buyid Shiites, driven by political expediency and largely uninterested in theological matters, chose to retain the Sunni Abbasid caliph, other Shiite movements, who split away, were unwilling to be satisfied with worldly matters and to render unto the caliph that which was in heaven. Unlike the Buyids, who were Twelver Shiites, the Fatimids were Ismaili Shiites,[11] and the emergence of the Fatimid caliphate, whose fate would be so closely linked to that of Saladin, is a major event in Islamic history. Emerging initially in North Africa in 909, the dynasty, named after the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of Ali, ruled an empire that extended from Palestine to North Africa. It was under the imam Muizz that the Fatimids reached the height of their glory. Served by the brilliant general Jawhar, the Fatimids took full advantage of the political fragmentation which lay ahead of them throughout the Muslim world and, for a brief period, it truly did appear that the universal triumph of Ismailism was about to be achieved. In 969 Jawhar routed the Turkish Ikhshidids, who

controlled Egypt, and the Fatimids entered the country victorious. A new capital city was now commissioned: the original Cairo, or al-Qahira (the triumphant), as it was called by its founder the Fatimid caliph al-Muizz, was built between 969 and 973, and its foundation was inaugurated in great splendour. By the beginning of the eleventh century, Cairo, which was adjacent to the old city of Fustat, had grown to be one of the largest and most cosmopolitan urban complexes of the medieval world. From the start, the Fatimids brazenly rejected the spiritual claims of the Abbasids, but in sharp contrast with the other Shiite dynasties of this period, who merely sought power, they openly declared that the true spiritual and political leader was the imam, the progeny of Ali, who naturally was none other than the Fatimid caliph.

For the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, the news emerging from Fatimid Cairo was alarming. Not only in the mosques of Egypt was the name of the Fatimid imam invoked, but also in Mecca and Medina, where Fatimid power had spread, for whoever controlled Egypt controlled the route to the holy sites. And not just in Arabia, but also in Syria, where Damascus fell to Jawhar. Half of the Islamic world was under Fatimid control and the other half appeared destined to follow. But what was more alarming for the Sunni caliph was not just a political but an ideological threat. A magnificent college – al-Azhar – was established in Cairo to preach the Ismaili doctrine and propagandists were despatched to all corners of the Muslim world to preach its message. Politically, ideologically and also economically a threat, under the Fatimids Egypt flourished and Alexandria shone like a jewel, the 'market of the two worlds' in the words of William of Tyre. Trade was brisk between the city-port and the Italian republics of Amalfi, Venice and Pisa. From the south and the Sudan trade flowed north, carrying gold and ivory and Arabica. Along the Nile vast quantities of corn grew – enough to feed the land of Egypt many times over.[12]

Provoked by vociferous public Shiite demonstrations and denuded of any political authority, the Abbasid caliph now took up the religious mantle of defender of Sunnism, perhaps out of religious motivation, certainly out of political expediency. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the caliph al-Qadir ordered that epistles be read out in the caliphal diwan (palace) which articulated his beliefs and which developed into a creed known as the Qadiri Creed. This was a strident combative Sunnism, reflecting the besieged mentality of the caliph. Three edicts were proclaimed in the

caliph's palace and on each of these occasions there was a gathering of judges and scholars, who heard the reading of the edict and signed it, as proof of their presence. Each edict was more elaborate than the preceding one, the third being of such length that it reportedly required attendance throughout the day, until nightfall. Lengthy and elaborate they may have been, but the Qadiri epistles were important for they contained an explicit and positive definition of Sunnism. Hitherto the Sunnis had been defined by their opposition to Shiism, but with the Qadiri Creed there now existed a definition of what a Sunni should believe in. No longer would it be possible to be simply a Muslim; one was either a Sunni or a Shiite.[13] The Sunni response to the Shiite demonstrations has been labelled by historians as the Sunni Revival. In reality it was more of a transformation and an integration than a revival, and was not the work of one man or dynasty alone but a cumulative and wide-ranging process that touched on almost all aspects of Islamic thought: from law to theology and from mysticism to politics. Neither did it proceed in a linear fashion; there was no uniform Sunni movement, and accusations of heterodoxy were common among the diverse and mutually opposed Sunni schools.

The successful entry into Baghdad by the Turkish Sunni Seljuqs, in 1058, marks a new chapter in the history of this period. A Turkic people from the steppes who had entered military service in the Abbasid empire, the Seljuqs, who were fervently Sunni, succeeded in seizing power in Baghdad and, under Toghril Beg, expelling the Shiite Buyids from the city. The fall of the Buyids meant that never again would the caliph find himself a hostage of the Shiites, and the power of the state could now be employed aggressively to confront Shiism and the Ismailis in particular. In Baghdad the Seljuqs stumbled across a mere shadow of the caliphate, one which politically had allowed half of the Muslim world to fall into the hands of the Fatimids. And yet its allure remained unmistakable, for even in its weakness the institution was revered by the Turkish parvenus, recent converts to Islam, as a symbol of legitimacy. And so politically the Seljuqs were to play shoguns to the caliph's mikado.[14]

Building a new Sunni orthodoxy

It is with the Seljuqs that we can finally speak of the two men who are universally acknowledged to have been the architects of the Sunni Revival:

the Persian vizier of the Seljuq sultans, Nizam ul-Mulk, and the great theologian, mystic and thinker, al-Ghazali. In trying to comprehend the genius that was inherent in the two men, we go a long way to understanding the character of Saladin himself, for one cannot begin to understand the actions of Saladin without first understanding those of Nizam ul-Mulk, nor can one comprehend the intellectual and spiritual world in which Saladin lived without examining the contribution which al-Ghazali made to its firmament. In many ways, Saladin was the heir of Nizam ul-Mulk and his actions mirrored those of the great Seljuq minister. As for al-Ghazali, in his biography of Saladin, Newby makes the point that had it not been for him, Saladin would have been much more of a fundamentalist,[15] and in that statement, as we shall see, there is considerable truth. To understand Saladin one needs to understand this new Sunnism that was emerging and, in that sense, Nizam ul-Mulk can be seen as its political manifestation and al-Ghazali as its spiritual one. The epistles of the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir may have enjoyed considerable resonance but they were not papal edicts and no one was obliged to follow them. Above all they were a symbolic message of a defiant Sunnism, but they would have come to naught had not Nizam ul-Mulk fashioned this new Sunnism into a policy and integrated it into the political and administrative framework of Seljuq rule. The Sunni Revival truly began with him.

In the second half of the eleventh century the history not just of Baghdad but of the Islamic world was dominated by the figure of Nizam ul-Mulk, the Persian minister to the Turkish Seljuq sultans Toghril Beg and Malik Shah. But to understand the political genius[16] of Nizam ul-Mulk and his actions, which would have profound if unexpected repercussions, we need first to make a brief diversion into the world of law and theology. Within 50 years of the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632, the Muslim armies had conquered the whole of North Africa, and Islam had reached from Morocco to Egypt and from the Yemen to the Caucasus; and by the tenth century Islam had spread over three continents, from the Pyrenees in the west to Siberia in Northern Europe and from Morocco in Northern Africa to China in Asia. With this rapid geographic spread new problems emerged for the ulama and the judges (qadis) in interpreting and applying a uniform Islamic law, since a judge in Trans-Oxania was not faced with the same daily legal problems as one in Maghrib, nor one in Kufa with the same situation as in Medina.[17] This eventually led to the establishment of legal

schools that were called madhahib (singular: madhab),[18] of which four were by far the most important and have survived to this day: the Maliki, Hanafi, Shafii and Hanbali. With the establishment of the schools of law, the Sharia became, in Hodgson's memorable phrase, no longer an adventure but a heritage,[19] and Sunni orthodoxy was determined by membership in one of the schools of law. Indeed every Sunni Muslim, to this day, follows in their daily rituals, or in matters such as inheritance, one of the schools of law. To switch from one madhab to another required no formality and did not alter a person's religious status; an excellent example of this was Muhammad Ibn Khalaf, who died a couple of years before Saladin's birth, and who was known as 'Hanfash', because he belonged at different times to three of the different schools (Hanbali, Hanafi and Shafii).[20] While the political disintegration of the caliphate therefore meant that there was no longer a single power ruling over the whole Muslim world, the same laws continued to be administered, regardless of the collapse of the centre. At the same time this was an age when theology was debated within the framework of the law schools and two major theological schools played a role during this period: Mutazilism and Asharism. Mutazilis (the word means those who withdraw) saw the Islamic creed through a more rationalistic interpretation and criticised elements of popular belief. Their insistence on allegorical interpretations appealed strongly to the Hanafi scholars. The Hanbalis, on the other hand, were largely opposed to the rationalist interpretation and demanded an unquestioning belief in the literal meaning of the Quran. God sees, hears, is moved to anger; He smiles, sits and stands. The *how* passes human understanding and humans ought not to meddle in such things.[21] Between these two opposing positions, the Asharis (named after Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari) assumed a middle ground and held a position in which orthodox dogma was 'diluted by a few rationalistic flourishes';[22] conceding to the Hanbalis a literal interpretation of the Quran, while reserving the right to defend it rationally. This middle ground, which found most favour with the Shafiis, would ultimately become recognised as the largest school of theology and the orthodox view in Islam.[23] The early Sunni response to the Shiite challenge was Hanbali in flavour. Indeed the Abbasid caliph himself was a Hanbali. Adopting a literalist interpretation of the Quran and militant in its assertion, the Hanbali school has been the 'favourite whipping boy of modern scholarship in Islamic studies',[24] and it is easy to see why. Unlike the other three schools, they were regarded as troublesome and reactionary,

due to their intolerance of views other than their own and their reluctance to give personal opinion on matters of law. That said, at a time when the Sunnis felt besieged by the Shiite presence, it was the Hanbalis who took up the challenge with their strong support for the Qadiri Creed, and they did so with a typical militant vigour – they set fire to the mausoleum of al-Husayn in Karbala.

This was the intellectual background that confronted Nizam ul-Mulk, and his genius lay in his understanding that the anti-rational, anti-Ashari literalist Hanbali position could not form an ideological platform on which to build a middle-of-the-road Sunni orthodoxy. The Qadiri Creed had warned of punishment and exile for those Muslims who intellectually transgressed, but such a confrontational attitude, perhaps necessary while the caliph was under a Shiite siege, could not be maintained in the long term. In reality, and paradoxical as it may sound, Nizam ul-Mulk, the architect of the Sunni Islamic revival, found the caliphal doctrine too 'Islamic'. He himself was a Shafii, but Toghril Beg, the sultan whom he served, was a Hanafi and the caliph was a Hanbali. If that wasn't enough, both the sultan and the caliph were rigorous in their refusal to accept the viewpoints of others. Toghril Beg had ordered the cursing of Asharis from the pulpits and their exiling from their homes. The Hanbali scholar Ibn Aqil, famously censured by the Hanbalis for listening to the opinion of scholars from the other madhabs, summed up the acrimonious situation well: 'My Hanbali colleagues wanted me to flee the presence of a group of other ulama. Doing so would have deprived me of useful knowledge.' The theological arguments between the different schools of law were often resolved not through intellectual debate or sophistry but by thuggery and violence, and brawls spilt on to the streets of Baghdad, often claiming victims, accompanied by chants such as 'Today is the day for Hanbalis, not Shafiis or Asharis!' Anecdotes relating to the hostility between the schools were numerous; when the judge Mansur Abu al-Maali al-Jili, a Shafii, was told that a man had lost his donkey in a quarter of Baghdad which was predominantly Hanbali, he ordered that the man go into that quarter and take what he desired, since he would not find anything there of greater value than his donkey.

Zealously enforcing conformity to opinion, the Hanbali ulama judged every action and idea by its Islamic value, and nothing it seemed was beyond an Islamic interpretation. Everything was now formulated and expressed through religion: politics, personal behaviour, intellectual endeavours. Indeed

if the more zealous ulama had had their way, no Muslim would have been allowed to learn anything that was not certified as religiously edifying by the ulama themselves. Even chronicles and belles-lettres would have been barely tolerated.[25] This utilitarianism, had it been given its full rein, would have suffocated Islam. The religion needed to 'breathe' and rigour to be balanced and given more depth. The Muslim community was a large one, and the spiritual inclinations of almost everyone needed, within the limits of orthodoxy, to be accommodated. This is where al-Ghazali came in. Recognised as the undisputed figurehead of the revived Sunnism of the Seljuq period, al-Ghazali's outlook was close to that of Nizam al-Mulk and not just because the latter was his patron, for both men understood that in the post-caliphate era government and religion had to be linked. In al-Ghazali's often repeated dictum, 'religion and government are twin-brothers'. Through the experiences of his personal life, where he dramatically abandoned his successful teaching career to live the life of a wandering sufi, to his writings, especially the *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error) and his magisterial *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Religious Sciences), al-Ghazali built the spiritual platform for the political order that was the work of his patron Nizam ul-Mulk. To put it another way, if for Nizam ul-Mulk an ecumenical approach – the attempt to offer the emerging Sunni orthodoxy a certain 'width' – was a political necessity, then al-Ghazali's efforts to offer it 'depth' was borne out of spiritual necessity.

Al-Ghazali's intention was to build a comprehensive foundation for the religious life of the community. Well-versed in the theological, philosophical and spiritual debates that were raging in the Muslim world, he profoundly understood that, to a large extent, they reflected particular needs in human souls, since not all men were the same. Sunni Islam had undergone a rapid phase of scholastic elaboration which had touched on all fields of knowledge – from the codification of the law, to the compiling of the hadith, to the refinement of the theological debates which continued to rage. Yet this process of integration and development, brilliant though it was, threatened to neglect the vital sphere of the inner life, the individual soul's deeper relationship with God. In other words, without the dimension of spirituality, constituted in practice by sufism, the religion remained a dead letter.[26] With al-Ghazali the age of Asharism was ushered in, but the undoubted contribution made by the other schools of thought was equally recognised. In this way a new, integrated, inclusive Sunni orthodoxy was

built.[27] Divergent legal interpretations and opinions among the schools of law needed to be accepted as orthodox by all Muslims. Heated debates and colourful accusations could not be allowed to obscure this fundamental point. No longer would the Hanbalis be allowed to become the moral patrol of the Muslim world. Ultimately Nizam ul-Mulk's moderate orthodoxy, articulated by al-Ghazali and more or less universally accepted by all Muslims, was the theological trilogy of Shafiism as the school of law, Asharism as its dogmatic theology, and Sufism as its mystical tradition. The first of the three was interchangeable with the other schools of law, but the other two theologies became the cornerstones on which Sunni orthodoxy was built. However, rather than persecute those who intellectually opposed him or even ignore them, Nizam ul-Mulk welcomed them and bestowed his friendship, a friendship often smoothed by financial support. And so he tolerated Abu Yusuf al-Qazwini, for example, a rationalist who was in the habit of brazenly announcing himself to Nizam ul-Mulk's doorman as 'Abu Yusuf the Mutazili'.[28] Interestingly, the ecumenicalism of this Sunni orthodoxy extended as far as the Shiites – the Imami or Twelver Shiites, it needs to be emphasised, and not the Ismailis. So, for example, Ibn Hubayra, who was a contemporary of Saladin and who died in 1165 and who was the vizier under two Abbasid caliphs, preached an ecumenical policy which was directed towards Shiism.

It was in Baghdad, a city denuded of political power, that the seeds of the Sunni Revival were sown. To that city, and from the east and the west, travelled theologians, philosophers, mystics and jurists, and gradually a new Sunni orthodoxy began to emerge. Initially literalist and confrontational, it was transformed, thanks to the political wisdom and acumen of men such as Nizam ul-Mulk, al-Ghazali and Ibn Hubayra – into a broad church which was inclusive enough to gather within its orthodoxy the views of the vast majority of Muslims. Now, this idea began to spread west and into the land of Syria, and it did so at the same time as the arrival of the crusaders.

Chapter 2

The Turning of the Tide

The sultans disagreed and the Franks seized the lands.

Ibn al-Athir

Baghdad was transformed by the Sunni Revival and now, as the ideas flowed west into Syria, another former imperial capital city would be transformed. Damascus once had been the capital of the Umayyads but, with the Abbasid revolution in 750, it had dramatically lost its position and with it its importance and allure. For though it remained at the centre of the Islamic world, it was a centre which in truth was a political backwater, one deprived of the military manpower and the opportunity for plunder normally found on the frontier regions. In the words of Chamberlain, Damascus' geographical centrality ensured its political marginality.[1] With the arrival of the crusaders however, the situation was dramatically transformed and Syria, with Damascus at its centre, would step – as it had in the early years of the Islamic conquests – once again into the spotlight. The Syria of this period was a region bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the west and by the Byzantium empire in the north. The Euphrates river was its natural frontier in the north-east, while the Arabian desert lay in the south-east and Egypt in the south-west. Within these borders one could travel from sandy beaches to snowy cedars and from abundant plains to barren deserts. Two parallel north–south mountain ranges cut through the land, dividing the wetter – hence more fertile – land in the west from the arid land

lying in the east. The mountain ranges are accompanied by two rivers: the Jordan and the Orontes. Within this Damascus was geographically ideally located, for not only was it one of the main centres for assembling the pilgrimage caravans, but also formed a vital crossroad for the control of the military and trade routes between northern Syria and Iraq on the one hand and between Palestine and Egypt on the other.

The geographical diversity of the land was matched by its political fragmentation. Cities and provinces were ruled by princes and governors as well as semi-independent Arab shaykhs, Turkmen chieftains and Fatimid supporters. The majority of Syria's population was Arab, but the military tended to be overwhelmingly Turkish or Kurdish. Although it can be fairly claimed that most Muslims in Syria in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were Sunni Muslims, who were loyal to the Abbasid caliph, the distinction between the Sunni and Shiites needs to be qualified. There were, as Irwin has pointed out, many Sunnis who had Shiite leanings, while there were many Shiites who gladly served the Sunni caliph and Seljuq sultan. In other words Sunnis and Shiites lived cheek by jowl in the big Muslim cities,[2] and in cities such as Tripoli and Aleppo it was the Shiites who may well have formed the majority. Equally present were established Christian communities: Maronites, Armenians, Jacobites, Nestorians and Melkites. And within them too there existed distinctions; the Melkites, for example, looked to the Byzantine emperor for guidance and leadership, while the Jacobites, Maronites and Nestorians appeared to be content to practise their faith under Muslim rule. However, if the religious situation in Syria appeared complex on the eve of the arrival of the crusaders, it was clarity itself when compared to the political one, for Syria during this period was a war zone. Politically the strife followed established patterns familiar to all: an amir seized a city and asserted his suzerainty over it and over a small territory around it, and then immediately launched into a bewildering foray of protracted struggles and alliances with those in the city's vicinity. Al-Jahiz captures the spirit of the times when he wrote that amirs fought 'not for religion nor for interpretation of the scripture nor for sovereignty nor for taxes, nor for patriotism nor for jealousy . . . nor for the defence of the home nor for wealth, but only for plunder'.[3] To the Syrian, however, the endemic strife, plots, treacheries, alliances and calculated perfidies were less a sign of a breakdown of any legitimate political or social order than the inescapable environment.[4] In any case the fragmentation had an advantage; since almost

every town had its own ruler, Syrians only needed to travel a few miles to change political allegiances.

Lack of legitimacy was the cause of the strife; in Syria the founders of the 'dynasties' were military commanders who to survive needed to establish themselves and to deny their military supporters any autonomy, but needed to do so in the absence of any legal status which would formalise their position vis-à-vis the other amirs. If there is one theme that stands out during this period, it is that of illegitimacy and search for legitimacy. Rarely, if ever, did an amir enjoy universal assent to his rule, and though it cannot be denied that the ties between the amir and his military supporters were strong, these ties were not so much contractual as much as affectual,[5] and the terms used – suhba (companionship), for example – hinted at this. These were fiercely independent men who gave their word grudgingly and never without calculation. If they followed an amir it was because they believed that his star was in the ascendant and they would benefit to be in his wake. Above all personal, family and dynastic ambition was what mattered. In all this the caliph was regarded as the repository of ultimate Islamic legal legitimacy and each independent local ruler was required to hold a diploma from him as evidence of the legitimacy of his position. In effect, the caliph recognised, often via the despatch of robes of honour, whichever of the amirs had emerged triumphant from his local bloody struggle. Denuded of any power and unable to interfere in the struggles, the caliph simply certified their outcome. This fig leaf of moral authority, however, should not be underestimated, for it was valued highly by the competing amirs, who included his name on their coins and who, through constant long letters of appeals or eloquent ambassadors, sought a formal investiture from him in an attempt to cover the fact that their rule was illegitimate.

The arrival of the Crusades in Syria

The First Crusade hit Syria like a bolt from the blue.[6] Had the crusaders[7] arrived just a few years earlier they would have had to confront Nizam ul-Mulk and the Seljuq sultan Malik Shah, but both men had died in 1092, within a month of each other, and the familiar – for the two men had ruled for a combined total of 50 years – had given way to the uncertain. For the Muslims these were turbulent times and for the crusaders propitious ones.[8] In June 1097 the crusaders conquered the Seljuq capital at Iznik, inflicting

a heavy defeat on Kilij Arslan at the battle of Dorylaeum. Edessa fell to them in March 1098, as did Antioch in June of the same year. In 1099, with the capture of Jerusalem, the goal of the crusaders was achieved, and Godfrey of Bouillon became its first ruler. As news spread of the brutal massacres perpetuated by this strange and unexpected enemy[9] on the inhabitants of Maarrat al-Numan and Jerusalem in 1098–9, floods of refugees and displaced poured into the two major cities of Syria – Aleppo and Damascus. The demographic complexity of Syria undoubtedly helped the crusader advance. Northern Syria had a large population of Armenians and Syriacs, and in Lebanon there were many Maronites. Many of these groups joined ranks with the invading Christian army and provided them with intelligence and acted as their guides.[10]

With the establishment of the four crusader city-states[11] accomplished, the Franks turned their attention to capturing the Muslim-held coastal cities, which would enable them to secure their supply lines and communication with Europe. The Italian cities, motivated by commercial opportunities, helped them secure this task. Genoa aided in the capture of Caesarea in 1101, Tartous in 1102, Acre and Jubail in 1104 and Tripoli in 1109; and Venice assisted in seizing Beirut and Sidon in 1110, as well as Tyre in 1124. Only Ascalon – which did not fall until 1153 – remained in Muslim hands. In all this the Muslims provided feeble if any resistance. It was the caliph who was expected to take the lead in the defence of Muslim lands against the Franks, but the caliph was little more than a Seljuq puppet, and the Seljuq sultan never came in person to lead his armies into Syria against the Franks. What is noteworthy is that the initial resistance to the Franks came not from the military but from the ulama, the religious scholars.[12] As early as 1099 al-Harawi, the chief qadi of Damascus, preached a sermon in the Great Mosque of Baghdad in which he pleaded for aid – 'Your brothers in Syria have no home other than the saddles of their camels or the entrails of vultures' – but his words struck no chord. A few years later, in 1111, clerics from Aleppo made their way to Baghdad. They knew that words on their own would not move armies, so instead they disrupted the performance of the Friday prayers and prevented the preacher from delivering the sermon. This was shocking behaviour and it was meant to be so – an attempt to shake and shame the authorities into action. And the caliph was indeed shocked and angered, but not because he was moved by the desperate actions of the Aleppans but because the disruptions clashed with the arrival

in Baghdad of his beautiful new bride from Isfahan. He even sought to punish the agitators for their disruptions.[13]

And yet despite the Muslim apathy, paralysis and fear that allowed the crusaders to sweep through their land, a stubborn fact stands out: the territory occupied by the crusaders was limited to a narrow long strip of land bordering the Mediterranean and their forays eastwards and inland into the Muslim heartland were unsuccessful. Outremer – that collection of kingdoms and principalities which the Christians founded – was dangerously fragile. Even when the crusaders were at the peak of their power, its greatest length was 135 kilometres (85 miles), and its greatest width only 65 kilometres (40 miles). In some places it was even narrower; between Beirut and Tripoli, the Frankish occupation went only 30 kilometres (20 miles) inland.[14] The Franks had been unable to capture Damascus, nor did Aleppo fall in the north, and the frontier cities of Homs and Hama also remained in Muslim hands. The only major inland success was Edessa, and Edessa was the first crusader state to be extinguished.[15] At the same time it became rapidly clear that the land conquered by the Franks was too large for them to occupy just with their people. The land could not remain uncultivated nor could trade cease. In fact it was the issue of land rather than that of holy war which dictated the external policy of the Franks throughout the twelfth century. Land and its possession was responsible for the aggressive warfare waged by the early Latin rulers,[16] and land could only be controlled once the walled towns and castles which lay within had fallen.

It is not possible to mention Edessa without mentioning Imad al-Din Zengi. Atabeg[17] of Mosul from 1127 and ruler of Aleppo from 1128, Zengi built a powerful empire in northern Syria and Mesopotamia, but his ambitions did not rest there; in 1135 Hama fell to him, and Homs and Baalbek followed, but the ultimate prize – the one he craved most, Damascus – eluded him. In 1135, 1137 and 1139 Zengi attempted to capture Damascus and each time, to thwart him, the Burids of Damascus were forced to make a treaty with the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, who in return was glad to help, as their biggest fear was a unified Mosul, Aleppo and Damascus. Not by force would Damascus open its gates, but by persuasion, and not to him but to his son. Raised in the hard school of the military aristocracy of his day,[18] Zengi was a ruthless commander who ruled his territories with a rod of iron.[19] In his men he inspired not love or respect but fear, for they recognised in him a cruel streak and kept their distance. 'Like a leopard in

character', is how Saladin's contemporary biographer Imad al-Din al-Isfahani described him, 'and like a lion in fury'. The twelfth-century historian Ibn al-Adim writes that when Zengi was on horseback the troops used to walk behind him and those who transgressed were crucified. Nevertheless, as Hillenbrand writes, 'all his misdeeds were pardoned by the Muslim chroniclers',[20] and the reason for this was Edessa. In 1144, on Christmas Eve, Zengi gained his most famous victory when the city, one of the four crusader principalities, fell to his army. The news sent shock-waves throughout Europe and precipitated the Second Crusade, for both sides understood the symbolic value of what had just occurred. The fall of Edessa meant that henceforth the Franks were confined to the Levant, and more importantly it signalled the end of the defensive period in the Muslim resistance. The tide had turned.

The establishment of Saladin's father and uncle

Mosul was indeed Zengi's city, but there was a time when he nearly lost it all and was in desperate need for a favour to avoid disaster. It was with that favour that we first hear of Saladin's father. We know what we know about Saladin's ancestry largely thanks to the biographer Ibn Khallikan, who was born 18 years after Saladin's death and who made a special study into the history of his family.[21] Ibn Khallikan noted that Saladin's family originated from Dvin which lay on the left bank of the river Garni, which flows into the Araxes in Armenia (near the modern town of Tiflis). Near the gate of Dvin, he writes, was located a village called Ajdanaqan, all the inhabitants of which were Kurds, and it was there that Ayyub, the father of Saladin and the son of Shadi, was born. The family belonged to the Kurdish tribe of Rawadiya. Ibn Khallikan then concludes, 'I have carefully studied their genealogy but have not found any mention beyond Shadi'.[22] Interestingly the crusaders noted Saladin's background accurately, 'not of noble parents, but not a low plebeian of obscure blood'.[23] Like most Kurds, Saladin's family were Sunni Muslims and followed the Shafii madhab. It is important to lay to rest the myth about Saladin's background and to resist the temptation to romanticise his early years. For example, there is a common idea that the Kurds led a wild pastoral life and were a gallant and warlike people, impervious as a rule to civilisation. Gallant and warlike they may have been, but they were equally astute political players. In an age of violence, a certain

worldly understanding of the rules of realpolitik was indispensable to survival. As Minorsky eloquently puts it, 'in a word, Saladin's father and uncle did not come to Iraq and Syria as semi-barbarous shepherds . . . They brought with them recollections of a whole system of politics and behavior.'[24] Nevertheless they were Kurds – to a large extent outsiders – in a world dominated by Turks, who looked down upon them. Saladin himself would suffer from this discrimination, which in many ways was not unlike that of a Corsican trying to establish himself in France. And he was definitely a Kurd, even though some have claimed that Saladin was originally an Arab, arguing that many Arab tribes often settled in Kurdish areas and married among them. Those who argued this even traced Saladin's lineage back to the Umayyad caliph, Marwan, whose mother was Kurdish, pointing to his ancestral line as Yusuf, son of Najm al-Din Ayyub, son of Shadi, son of Marwan. This is certainly fictitious and probably an Arab attempt to 'claim' Saladin when he was at the height of his power.

Accompanied by his two sons – Najm al-Din Ayyub (described by Elisseeff as 'Cet homme, plein de sagesse et connaissant bien la nature humaine')[25] and Asad al-Din Shirkuh – Saladin's grandfather, Shadi, travelled to Baghdad, where he had some contacts and was appointed as guardian of the citadel in Tikrit, which lay on the Tigris north of Baghdad just under halfway to Mosul. There is no definite date as to when Shadi settled in Tikrit, but it would probably have been in the 1120s. Tikrit had been granted to Mujahid al-Din Bihruz who, as the governor and the police chief in Baghdad, delegated Shadi to control the city on his behalf. It appears that Bihruz and Shadi had been friends in Dvin and it was there that Bihruz had been discovered in a compromising position with the wife of an official and as a result was castrated. He then joined the service of the Seljuqs where the sultan employed him to the guardianship of his children – a position which only eunuchs held. From that moment his career flourished until he became the wali (governor) and shihna (chief of police) of Baghdad, a post which he held for more than 30 years until his death in 1145.[26]

Shadi died in Tikrit, we are uncertain when exactly, and his tomb – covered by a cupola – is located within the town, and Ayyub took over his father's position. And so things would have probably remained – an honourable but unambitious post for Ayyub – if it were not for the one incident which ultimately would change everything and transform the fortunes of his family. The incident occurred in 1131 and involved Zengi, who at that time

was the atabeg of Mosul. During one of the many internecine struggles which plagued the era, Zengi had marched on Baghdad but was defeated and his forces scattered. Beating a hasty retreat with his bedraggled army, he reached Tikrit, where he urgently appealed to Ayyub for shelter and help to allow him to reach Mosul safely. Not only did Ayyub have no reason to help Zengi, it was against his interests to do so, as he was holding Tikrit for the powers in Baghdad whom Zengi had attacked. But he sensed something – perhaps he recognised that Zengi's star was in the ascendant – and went against his instructions and allowed Zengi refuge in the citadel, where he remained for 15 days. Ayyub then helped Zengi cross the Tigris and afforded him supplies to enable him to reach Mosul. And that was that; Zengi went on his way and Bihruz, though angered by Ayyub took no action.

Six years were to pass, until in 1137 another incident occurred, this time concerning not Ayyub but Shirkuh. Unlike his taciturn brother, Shirkuh was a fiery man, a formidable military commander but one possessed with a short temper. Falling into an argument with one of Bihruz's scribes, Shirkuh struck and killed him, and when news of this incident reached Baghdad, Bihruz ordered that Ayyub and Shirkuh leave Tikrit at once. A rash action by Shirkuh, one which appeared to condemn his brother into historical obscurity, but fate dictated otherwise. Gathering his womenfolk and possessions, Ayyub, accompanied by his chastened brother, departed Tikrit under the cover of night, uncertain where to head next, and it was on that night, as Ayyub himself recalled many years later, that he was informed that his wife had given birth to a son: Yusuf – better known by his title Salah al-Din, which was corrupted by Western writers to Saladin.

Zengi had not forgotten the favour and he now summoned Ayyub and Shirkuh to Mosul, where they entered his service. Zengi recognised that the garrulous Shirkuh possessed formidable skills in military matters, while Ayyub was more diplomatic. In 1139 he therefore placed Ayyub in charge of the garrison of Baalbek, though not before an incident of barbarity which greatly marked Saladin's father. For two months Baalbek had held out against Zengi's army and with the passing of each day Zengi's frustration grew. Negotiations dragged on between the citadel and the besieging army until safe conduct was guaranteed. Still, the defenders of Baalbek were anxious and they asked for Zengi to swear on the Quran that he would uphold his end of the pact, and though he did as they requested, they were right to be suspicious. Once the gates were opened, Zengi ordered that all the men

be executed and the women and children sold into slavery. Admittedly the fact that arsenal had been left behind in the citadel meant the terms of the surrender had not been complied with, but the ensuing bloodshed was excessive and counter-productive, for the people of Damascus now doubled their efforts to prevent Zengi from seizing their city. For Ayyub the massacre at Baalbek was horrific – for Zengi had broken his oath – and unnecessary, for it served no purpose. In vain he tried to intervene to prevent further spilling of blood, though Zengi did grant his request that an old man and his son be spared. Ayyub now assumed control of the citadel and it was in that city that Saladin spent his first few years.

It is difficult to imagine what the young Saladin would have made of the great temples of Jupiter and Bacchus which towered over the city, and similarly one wonders if he ever stopped and gazed at the pyramids when he set foot in Egypt. Saladin could hardly have chosen a better place to grow up; over 1,000 metres (3,280 feet) above sea level, Baalbek's weather was clement in the summer and cold in the winter – in the middle of which fur coats had to be worn. The Beka'a valley which surrounded the city was rich in agricultural produce, and apricot and fig trees were plentiful, and it was in Baalbek that Ayyub, as a reflection of his tendency towards mysticism, built a hospice for sufis, the Najmiyya (the name derived from Ayyub's first name, Najm al-Din). It appears that Ayyub was a deeply religious man, for during his lifetime he made a special request that he be buried near the Prophet, a request which was ultimately fulfilled by Saladin, who ensured that both his father and his uncle Shirkuh were buried in Medina.

Imad al-Din al-Isfahani writes that whenever Zengi slept, 'a number of his eunuchs used to sleep around his bed. They used to take care of him both in his wake and sleep. They protected him like lions in war, and visited him even in his dreams.' The eunuchs were the sons of noble men, for it was Zengi's habit to kill people if he became angry with them, and keep their sons with him and castrate them. It was Yaranqash, described as the leader of the eunuchs, who, in 1146, stabbed and killed Zengi in his tent. News of Zengi's murder spread rapidly until it reached his two sons. Nur al-Din, the younger son, rushed at once to the tent where the body lay. Perhaps he had been told that his father had been slain while in a drunken stupor, or maybe he had been spared that detail. Stepping into the tent he gazed at his father's cold body, then, bending down he pulled the signet ring off his father's finger and placed it on his own. A symbolic gesture by a young man

whose achievements would rapidly eclipse those of his father and would establish him as the true originator of the counter-crusade and the champion of Sunni orthodoxy in Syria.

The rise of Nur al-Din and the spread of madrasas

News of Zengi's death had also reached the Franks, and Joscelin, the deposed prince of Edessa, quickly took advantage to seize back his city. At once Nur al-Din set out to lay siege. The Franks, seeing the force of his army, abandoned the city and its inhabitants, the majority of whom were Christian, to the mercy of Nur al-Din. That day none was shown, and the city was plundered and its inhabitants massacred. From that moment neither the principality of Antioch nor the county of Edessa would be able to pin down the Muslim forces in northern Syria, and this, in the long term, would have a profound and devastating impact on the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Europe was shocked by the news of the fall of Edessa, and though a second crusade was sent to recapture Edessa, quickly the crusaders realised that there was no Edessa to recover. With Aleppo and Edessa now firmly in his grip and with Mosul under his brother's control, Nur al-Din turned his eyes, like his father had done, towards Damascus, the most important city in Syria. In the meantime the rulers of Damascus had taken the opportunity of Zengi's death to move against Baalbek and they laid siege to the city. And so Ayyub, a few years earlier the besieger, was now the besieged. At first he held out and sent urgent requests to the sons of Zengi to come to his aid, but Nur al-Din was busy razing Edessa and Saif al-Din was occupied in Mosul, so no aid arrived. The massacre that Zengi had ordered in Baalbek now played on Ayyub's mind. He may not have possessed Zengi's military genius but in matters of diplomacy Ayyub outshone him. He could choose to defend the citadel to the bitter end, but that would mean that a lot of lives would be lost and the citadel would ultimately fall. There was honour in negotiating a settlement so, in 1146, Ayyub agreed to hand over Baalbek with no bloodshed in return for ten villages and a house in Damascus, to where he now moved. In fact such was Ayyub's reputation for probity that he was kept as castellan of the citadel of Baalbek, and for the next few years, accompanied by the young Saladin, he travelled between the two cities.

Over the years the traditional mantra invoked by the historians of the counter-crusade has been a familiar one: Zengi – Nur al-Din – Saladin; a sort of Islamic triple jump which regained Jerusalem. And yet if the counter-crusade is to be viewed as the political manifestation in Syria of the Sunni Revival then the validity of this triumvirate needs to be called into question. To understand why this is the case we need to return briefly to Nizam ul-Mulk's Baghdad. As we have seen, Nizam ul-Mulk's policies were driven by a striking vision, which was the restoration of a strong centralised Islamic state endowed with a moral character. Although he failed to implement this vision, since the forces of fragmentation were too advanced, he pursued several attempts at socio-political organisation, some of which succeeded in unexpected ways, even though they took two centuries to unfold.[27] Of these policies, the one that would have the most impact on Saladin was the creation and propagation of the madrasas, which would gradually evolve to become one of the most important institutions of Islamic civilisation.[28]

Definitions are important here. Although today the word madrasa simply translates as school, the original meaning was different. Usually translated as college, the madrasa was an educational institution specifically created to teach Islamic law (fiqh) according to one of the four Sunni schools. Other topics could be taught at a madrasa, but there could be no madrasa without law. Law could be, and was, taught at a mosque, but a mosque was not a madrasa since its principle function was not to teach fiqh. The universal association of the name of Nizam ul-Mulk with the madrasas – all of which were called Nizamiyya – which he had constructed first in Baghdad in 1067 then in most of the major cities, assumes the fact that madrasas originated with him. In fact they pre-dated him[29] and historians have argued that originally madrasas were simply natural extensions of the mosque.[30] No matter, the early madrasas were very much private in character and the teaching was both independent and personal.

With the arrival of Nizam ul-Mulk everything changed. In the words of Tabbaa, he pulled an important religious institution out of its vernacular beginnings, recreated it in an imperial image and in the capital city, and duplicated it on the major cities of the realm.[31] Although Nizam ul-Mulk's actions can be seen simply as those of an individual promoting his own madhab – for he was a Shafii and the Nizamiyya madrasas only taught Shafii law – to limit those actions to the personal or private sphere would be seriously to underestimate his vision of endowing the empire with a moral

framework. The sheer scale of the number constructed and their location tends to point to the unfolding of a blueprint which reflected his politics and ideology. As Tabaa points out, they may not have been state institutions, but the madrasas of Nizam ul-Mulk were definitely institutions for the state. In Baghdad, but also in Merv, Balkh, Nishapur, Tus, Rayy, Isfahan and many other cities, large and small, madrasas sprouted. The strategic locations were carefully selected within the realm so that each madrasa was used as a provincial centre with a wide catchment area embracing the smaller towns and villages. The historian Ibn al-Athir noted that no place was devoid of them; even Jazirat Ibn Umar – his native city – which he admitted was a forsaken corner, possessed one. Large madrasas but also small ones crammed into the corners and alleyways of densely populated cities. The earliest example of a madrasa which has survived is the madrasa of Gumushtegin in Busra in Syria, which bears the date of 1136. One is struck by how small it is in size; its external dimensions do not exceed 20 × 17 metres (65 × 55 feet), which meant that it could scarcely accommodate a handful of students. In that sense the Nizamiyya madrasas were the exception rather than the norm; for the majority of madrasas, small was beautiful.[32]

But why were they built? Why did Nizam ul-Mulk devote so much time and money commissioning a whole network across the Islamic world? The accepted reason was to combat the threat of Shiism and in particular the Fatimids in Egypt, who were actively propagating their message through their centres of learning, of which al-Azhar in Cairo was the most famous. And so madrasas were born as a reaction to Shiism. And yet the longevity and spread of the madrasas cannot simply be attributed to an anti-Shiite reaction since such an argument assumes a social and religious homogeneity in the Muslim world which simply did not exist. In reality, the social milieu of Baghdad when the Nizamiyya was founded in 1067 was not that of Alexandria, Damascus or Konya when the first colleges appeared in the first part of the twelfth century. When Nizam ul-Mulk constructed his first madrasa in Baghdad in 1067 the threat of Shiism, both politically and ideologically, was imminent and real; however, by the time Saladin constructed his first madrasa in Egypt, a century later, any threat had been more or less extinguished. Thus if the construction of madrasas was simply due to anti-Shiism, then it appears that madrasas were being built to counter a heretical threat that simply did not exist. So we return to Nizam ul-Mulk to discover other reasons for the rapid spread of madrasas. In his treatise on

government – the *Siyasatname* – he makes it clear that he sought to create a loyal cadre of Sunni administrators to man the bureaucracy. Previously what was most striking about those who manned the bureaucracies was that a large number were Christian or Shiite; in addition, many continued to admire the pre-Islamic models of the secretarial culture which they inherited, resulting in bureaucracies which adhered more to Persian Sasanian traditions than to the Islamic values which Nizam ul-Mulk was eager to promote. In the words of Humphreys, the clerical class had often been Shiite, Sasonophile and scandalously lax about religious matters.[33] This led to a courtly outlook which was often at fundamental variance with that of the ulama.[34] Al-Jahiz, for example, the famous essayist, attacked the arrogance of the secretaries and their sympathies toward Iranian traditions, and accused them of manifesting an indifference toward Islam. Nizam ul-Mulk was well aware of this, so gradually the majority of officials who came to fill both administrative and religious positions were orthodox in rite and madrasa-trained.[35]

Whether this was the initial aim of madrasas is unclear, but that it became its most enduring result there can be no doubt. Men who were educated in madrasas not only became religious functionaries but frequently became judges, ministers and government bureaucrats of all types.[36] Effectively they became incorporated within the framework of the government. What gradually emerged was the increasing necessity for a madrasa training for a position in government. In short, a madrasa education became a 'stamp' of approval signifying a knowledgeable Sunni potential secretary administrator. The madrasas transformed the nature of the ulama. Whereas during the first centuries of Islam the overwhelming majority of scholars of religion were part-time ulama who were employed in secular professions, the introduction of madrasas changed this dramatically. From simple teachers the professors of the madrasas became influential beyond their fields of study. They were consulted over all matters and not simply on those of abstract law, and they played a large part in setting the intellectual tone far beyond the mere transmission of hadith and fiqh.[37] Political issues of great importance were presented to them and their opinion and advice was eagerly sought.[38] And since religious and administrative officials were drawn from the same sources, it was not unusual to find a qadi and an administrator coming from the same family. One should add that the relationship between the rulers and the ulama was not one in which the ulama entered without ambiguity,

for fear of worldly corruption.[39] On one famous occasion, some ulama, on hearing of the erection of a madrasa in Baghdad, staged a mock funeral for knowledge, as they believed that true knowledge could not survive the passing of money.

Nothing symbolised the emergence in Syria of the vibrant Sunni orthodoxy more than the establishment of madrasas, which were an immediate and visible affirmation and tool of this orthodoxy. One can go as far as to say that it was incumbent upon anyone wishing to champion this revived orthodoxy to build a madrasa as a public manifestation of their adherence to its tenets and a private reflection of their piety. Therein lies the difference between Zengi and Nur al-Din and Saladin. Despite retrospective attempts by Muslim historians – most notably the pro-Zengid Ibn al-Athir – to portray Zengi as a Muslim hero and as the champion of the counter-crusade, it is clear that he was little more than an opportunistic and ruthless military warlord. To his end he remained loyal to his birthplace, Mosul, and his thinking – in particular his suspicion about Aleppo – was typical of a feudal ruler of the period. Mosul was Zengi's city and for 18 years, between 1126 and 1144, he ruled it and Aleppo, and yet he built no madrasas in either city. The only building activity to have been undertaken in Mosul during his period was the strengthening of Mosul's wall, the opening of the Imadi gate in 1133 and the extension of his diwan. Although Mosul had one madrasa – a Nizamiyya – which had been built at the end of the eleventh century, the city was not to see another college until the middle of the twelfth century. Many small mosques and shrines existed but they were largely insignificant and no ulama were connected to them. The question must be asked: if Zengi was the champion of the Islamic resurgence and Mosul its centre, why was Mosul so devoid of madrasas? It was only after Zengi's death that we first see the signs of the Sunni Revival reaching Mosul.[40]

Austere and ascetic by nature, Zengi's son Nur al-Din was described by Ibn al-Athir as a tall swarthy man with a beard but no moustache, a fine forehead and a pleasant appearance enhanced by beautiful, melting eyes. The traveller Ibn Jubayr wrote that he was one of the 'ascetic kings' and noted that he never wore silk, gold or silver. Indeed in later life he changed his grand clothing for the rough garments of the sufi. Deeply pious, he was an avid collector of religious books, and a biographical note by Ibn Asakir, who was a contemporary, noted his willingness to pay high prices to acquire books on hadith.[41] Of all the rulers, including Saladin, Nur al-Din endowed

the largest number of religious institutions in Syria, and it was under him that we see the beginnings of an alliance between the religious classes emerging from the madrasas and the military leadership. His religious politics were largely inspired by Ibn Hubayra, the influential Hanbalite jurist and vizier under the two Abbasid caliphs al-Muqtafi and al-Mustanjid. Ibn Hubayra's *Kitab al-Ifsah*, a copy of which Nur al-Din kept close to his side, drew on Nizam ul-Mulk's tolerant policy towards the four Sunni schools of law and was also very tolerant towards moderate Shiism, and he went as far as to argue that the Sunnis and the moderate Shiites should form a united front against the Fatimid Ismailis. Nur al-Din was also a strong believer that madrasas should not be limited to one school but should be open to all Sunni Muslims. In fact his whole belief was built on the cornerstone that there should be one ecumenical united Sunni state. But if his Islamic beliefs were ecumenically orthodox, his attitude towards the Franks was intransigent and implacable, and none more so than in 1149, when he defeated Raymond of Antioch at the battle of Inab. Raymond was slain and his head, encased in silver, sent to the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, to mark Nur al-Din's position as the Sunni Muslim's leading warrior.[42]

Nur al-Din maintained a very close relationship with the religious classes of Syria – it was claimed that he spent up to 9,000 dinars a month just on pious endowments – and in return the ulama not only supported him actively but also played their part in his military campaigns. His army contained religious men – lawyers and mystics – who were actually prepared to fight in the ranks. Also in the ranks were other figures – prayer leaders, Quran readers, preachers and judges.[43] The difference between Zengi and Nur al-Din can be viewed thus: whereas the Muslim chroniclers praise Zengi for his military achievements, in the case of Nur al-Din the emphasis is on the religious dimension of his career.[44] Prior to Nur al-Din, 16 privately constructed madrasas existed in the Zengid empire. During his reign 40 madrasas were constructed, of which Nur al-Din himself personally commissioned 20.[45] When he began his reign in Aleppo in 1146, there existed only one madrasa in the city. Three years later in 1149 his construction of the al-Hallawiyya madrasa – located deliberately just across from the Great Mosque – was a reminder to the Shiites of Aleppo that Sunnism was there to stay, and in that particular city the number of madrasas increased from one to eight. Clearly the madrasas appeared to challenge the predominant Shiite position in the city, and during their construction the Shiites sent

men at night to tear down what had been built during the day. Similarly, during a serious illness that Nur al-Din endured in 1157, during which his life hung in the balance, the Shiites of Aleppo went on the rampage and destroyed several madrasas. They would not have done so unless they perceived the madrasas as a threat to their sect. Crucially it appeared to matter little to which madhab the madrasa was commissioned; Hanafis built madrasas for Shafiis and Shafiis for Hanafis, and we see no signs of tensions in Syria which existed further east. What mattered was the actual building – partly as a barometer upon which an individual's level of orthodoxy was measured, certainly as a public expression of authority and power, and definitely as a sign of personal piety. The last factor must have been an important one, for how else does one explain the disproportionate number of madrasas constructed by women patrons?

If Nizam ul-Mulk symbolised the political manifestation of the Sunni Revival in the east, then Nur al-Din was its potent symbol in Syria. Indeed, so great was Nur al-Din's impact on those around him and so transformative was his presence and influence, that his actions created a tide which pulled Saladin and others in its wake. Throughout his life Saladin had to live with Nur al-Din's reputation and legacy looming over him. Certainly he was a source of inspiration, for Saladin had great respect for the man in whose court he grew up and to whom he owed so much. But he was also a burden, for it was, above all, Nur al-Din's legacy, and its supposed betrayal, which was used as a stick by Saladin's critics with which to beat him.

Chapter 3

The Young Saladin

These people speak nothing but Frankish; we do not understand what they say.

Usama Ibn Munqidh, twelfth-century Muslim warrior and courtier

From Aleppo Nur al-Din, accompanied by Shirkuh who had entered his service, watched as Baalbek surrendered to Damascus. Although Nur al-Din could not blame Ayyub for surrendering the city – since no one had been able to come to his aid – Ayyub's move to Damascus effectively meant that he was now in the Damascene camp, in theory opposed to Nur al-Din and his own brother. Aware how close the two brothers were, Nur al-Din naturally distanced himself from Shirkuh and for a period of time a certain tension existed between them. In the meantime, however, Ayyub had been busy and the old fox succeeded in having the Damascenes appoint him as head of their militia, which was an important defence force which guarded the city. It was a critical period for Damascus for, in 1148, the city suffered an onslaught from the Second Crusade. Even though the crusade itself was a fiasco, the effect it had on Damascus was profound, for not since the First Crusade had the inhabitants of a major Muslim city come face to face with the Franks. Prior to the Second Crusade, Damascus had become a Frankish protectorate; its atabeg paid tribute to the king of Jerusalem, put up with Frankish raids on his lands, and authorised the king's envoys to inspect the slave markets so as to release any Christian slaves.[1] But the unexpected

attack on the city – for initially the aim had been Edessa – changed everything. In fact, as events would prove, the decision to attack Damascus was disastrous for the crusaders and perhaps fatal in the long term to the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem itself,[2] for it demonstrated that Damascus was now the key to Syria. From Antioch and Aleppo the centre of conflict had shifted south to Damascus, and from Damascus it would move further south to Egypt. The crusaders penetrated as far as the gardens of the walls of Damascus, but then, confused by the network of streams and walls, were picked off by the militia and had to beat a hasty undignified retreat. No crusader was ever to set foot in Damascus except as an emissary, a tourist or, most commonly, as a prisoner of war.[3] The shock and horror caused by the Frankish attack now concentrated the minds of the Damascenes, and in that the ulama played a crucial role. As the heartbeat of Sunni Islam in Syria, Damascus had been the first city in which the seeds of the Sunni Revival had taken hold, and it was in Damascus – and in light of the Second Crusade – that the Islamic revanche commenced. It is noteworthy that Muslim sources are at pains to point out that during the siege of Damascus two members of the religious classes – Abd al-Rahman al-Halhuli and Yusuf al-Findawli – were killed while taking part in the fighting. If the fall of Edessa had signalled a change in the tide, then the siege of Damascus signalled a change in the mood of the Muslims.

The religious milieu in which Saladin grew up

We do not know whether Saladin was in Damascus during the attack on the city or whether, more probably, he was in Baalbek, but one can imagine that the dramatic and traumatic assault on the city would have impacted greatly on him. However, the question that needs to be asked is how much did he actually know of the Franks who were attacking Damascus? How did he view this strange enemy? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, was that Saladin would have known very little about the Franks and would have cared less. To understand why this was the case, we first have to understand that the Crusades were largely both a western phenomenon and obsession. In fact it would be fair to say that the Mongol invasion had a far more dramatic impact on the Muslims than the crusaders. Bernard Lewis has argued that for two centuries the Muslims of the Middle East were in intimate if hostile contact with groups of Franks established among them – yet at no time did

they develop the least interest in them.[4] This claim may appear slightly exaggerated, but it does without question capture the Muslim attitude towards the Franks. Although Muslim chroniclers used the term Ifranj (Franks) when identifying the emerging enemy, they quickly began to differentiate between them and began classifying them according to their ethnic groups.[5] Knowledge of the Franks, however, did not necessarily mean interest in them, and it can be safely surmised that Europe held few attractions for the medieval Muslim. Indeed, if Europe was perceived in the Muslim consciousness, then it was seen as a cold, intemperate place. The description of the chronicler al-Masudi of the Franks was typical of this view; the nature of the Europeans, he writes, was gross, their manners harsh, their understanding dull, and their tongues heavy. A contemporary of al-Masudi, Ibn Abi-l Ashath, who died in 970 went even further and declared that the inhabitants of Europe shed their hair annually as animals do. One century later the Muslim view had not altered, as was reflected in the writing of the Spanish Muslim Said Ibn Ahmad, who described the Europeans as being overcome with ignorance and apathy, lack of discernment and stupidity. Certainly a recurrent theme during this period among Muslim chroniclers was the moral baseness and lack of personal hygiene of the Franks. Writing half a century after Saladin's death, al-Qazwini asserted that Europeans bathed no more than once or twice a year and that they never washed their garments. Nowhere is there any attempt to move away from this caricature and towards a deeper understanding of the nature of the Franks, and this was largely due to the sense of superiority and condescension felt towards the Christians.

In short, despite the military defeats which saw the establishment of the crusading states, the Muslims remained adamant they had little to learn from Europe. So when a Christian knight offered to take Usama Ibn Munqidh's son back with him to Europe to educate him, Usama's response was one of barely concealed horror: 'A truly cultivated man would never be guilty of such a suggestion; my son might just as well be taken prisoner'. Even after Muslim knowledge of the Christians had deepened, the Muslims still clung to their old polemical stances. Sivan concludes that the lack of any attempt by the Muslims to engage with the Christians was because Islam was at that time in full stagnation,[6] but we have seen earlier how the Sunni Revival had led to a flowering of religious thought. Clearly Islam was not in stagnation and yet one is struck by the complete lack of curiosity shown by the Muslims towards the Christians. Certainly very few Muslims made an

effort to learn the languages spoken by the crusaders, and although on an everyday level Muslims and Franks engaged in trade such interactions must not be exaggerated; the ideological divide remained and regular contact did not, in the words of Hillenbrand, imply that the Muslims respected or liked the Franks, either individually or as a group.[7] At best the Muslims were intrigued by the Frankish idiosyncrasies and their manners, even if they viewed their presence as alien and unwelcome. Admittedly the Franks were courageous and hardened, but then again these were qualities best associated with animals. The references to animals was deliberate, as was the moral laxity, and were summed up by the term najas, which is best translated as things that are impure. To the Muslim ear no term is more shocking than that of najas, for it implies not simply a state of uncleanliness but of intrinsic impurity. For Muslims pigs are najas, and for medieval Muslims the Franks were najas. Not surprisingly, therefore, for Muslims the Frankish occupation of the al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was an act of grave desecration. Even more than the military occupation was the profanation of the Muslim sacred space by Christian symbols of worship: the gilded dome of the Dome of the Rock was surmounted by a cross and the al-Aqsa mosque was occupied by the Knights Templar. The removal of the cross was therefore one of Saladin's first acts. Indeed his actions, as we shall see, on entering Jerusalem in 1187, confirmed how deeply entrenched such Muslim views were.

Although the presence of oriental Christians meant that the Muslims were familiar with the tenets of the faith, they showed little interest in Christianity, whether it was Latin or Byzantine. It is likely that it must have taken some time for them to understand the difference between the native Christians and those pouring in from Europe. At the same time it was clear that those Franks who had settled among Muslims quickly became acclimatised to life in the orient and, human nature being what it is, they gradually adopted a Muslim lifestyle. Usama Ibn Munqidh described an incident when he was in Antioch and met with a knight who had arrived during the First Crusade. Usama was invited to the knight's house, where a meal was prepared. 'Eat and set your mind at ease,' the host assured Usama, 'for I don't eat the Franks food. I have Egyptian women cooks. I eat only what they have cooked and no pork enters my house.' The Muslims were also aware of another group of Franks – the military orders of the Hospitallers and the Templars – in whom the fire of the Crusades continued to burn

implacably bright and whose vows determined that no compromise be made. Towards them the Muslims showed an unwavering hostility, and Saladin certainly was uncompromising in his enmity towards them: 'I will purify the earth of these two filthy races', he claimed, and when the opportunity arose after his victory at Hattin he was true to his word.

The Muslims called Ascalon 'the virgin of the desert' for it had become the only coastal city which still held out against the Franks. But in 1153 Baldwin III captured the great city-port – an event that struck terror in the hearts of Damascenes, who firmly believed that their city would be the next one to fall. For the Damascenes there was only one possible protector: Nur al-Din. But they remained wary, for he was Zengi's son and he would surely seek a bloody revenge for the number of times they had thwarted his father. It was here that Ayyub's presence was crucial for Nur al-Din's cause, for he spoke to the people of Damascus and soothed their concerns, and they listened. In this way Ayyub was instrumental in handing Damascus to Nur al-Din, who entered the city in 1154 without any bloodshed. But first Ayyub knew that he had to soothe his own relations with Nur al-Din, for the latter had not forgotten that Ayyub had handed over Baalbek, and he did this in a manner which justified his reputation for diplomacy: he sent Saladin – now aged 14 years old – to Aleppo to enter into Nur al-Din's service. No more dramatic an act of loyalty could be offered, and the wily Ayyub knew it would be well received. Shirkuh now introduced his nephew to Nur al-Din – this was probably the first time the two met – and Nur al-Din reciprocated Ayyub's act by accepting Saladin into his service and by granting Saladin some land. As for Ayyub, he was richly rewarded and was made governor of Damascus, and once again the two brothers were re-united. For Nur al-Din the capture of Damascus – and peacefully at that – was the fulfilment of a dream, for he had now achieved what no Muslim ruler had accomplished since the height of the Abbasid caliphate: he united the two most important cities in Syria, Damascus and Aleppo, under one political banner. This development was watched with alarm by the Latin Kingdom of Jeruslaem but, for the time being, the political situation was finely balanced, with Nur al-Din's increasing power matched and confronted by two formidable kings of the Jerusalem: first Baldwin III, and, when he died in 1163, his successor Amalric.

When Nur al-Din entered Damascus he discovered that 11 religious institutions had been constructed.[8] What is noteworthy is that all 11 had

been endowed privately. In other words they were the products of pious acts rather than state policy. This all changed with his arrival; by the end of his reign Damascus had a total of 22 madrasas, while Aleppo – where the Shiite influence remained strong – had only eight.[9] A closer look at this period confirms the rapid growth of madrasas; between 1076 and 1154 – roughly from the establishment of the initial madrasas in Baghdad by Nizam ul-Mulk and Nur al-Din's entry into Damascus – 11 religious institutions were built, at an average of one every seven years. In roughly the same period of time, between 1154 when Nur al-Din entered the city and when Damascus fell to the Mongols – that is to say during the period when the city was under the rule of Nur al-Din, Saladin and the Ayyubids – 110 religious institutions were constructed, of which 92 were madrasas, at an average of just under one institution every year.[10] The social and political implications of this rate of growth would be profound.

Naturally the rapid increase of the number of madrasas in Syria demanded the appointment of qualified people who could teach in them. Although some native Sunni ulama could be found – like the Banu'l Adim of Aleppo and the Banu Asakir of Damascus – the rapid growth in the number of establishments meant that scholars from further afield had to be brought in. The welcoming of the ulama to Syria were the fruits of a positive and conscious policy first developed in Syria by Nur al-Din.[11] There could be no better example of the migration of scholars into Syria than that of Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri who had served Zengi in Mosul and who must have impressed Nur al-Din, since he brought him with him when he came to Damascus and appointed him to the position of qadi. This was symbolically a very important appointment, since Kamal al-Din was not only a scholar, a professor of Shafii law and a qadi of Damascus, but he was also Nur al-Din's vizier in charge of government administration and the state bureaucracy. No better example can be found of a scholar who gradually became transformed into a government official, and no clearer demonstration can there be of how closely Nur al-Din was inspired by Nizam ul-Mulk's diktat of twining religion and government and creating a loyal Sunni cadre of administrators.

The beginning of the Islamic counter-crusade

Saladin's family participated fully in the Sunni Revival which spread across Syria. His father, Ayyub, built a madrasa in Damascus and a sufi monastry

in Baalbek, while Shirkuh was more prolific; he founded two madrasas in Aleppo and two in Damascus, one of which overlooked the lawns created by Nur al-Din for military practice and polo, probably reflecting Shirkuh's position as the commander-in-chief of his army. The most striking thing about this madrasa was that it was open both for Shafiis and Hanafis. This was the second madrasa in the Muslim world – and the first in Syria – which combined two sects.[12] All this of course commenced with Nizam ul-Mulk, but never could he have imagined that the madrasas which he launched would be the institutions from which Nur al-Din and Saladin would draw their strength in their battles with the crusaders. In a previous century the Hanbali jurists had come to the Abbasid caliph's aid to support his Qadiri Creed. Now, once again, it was the jurists who carried the message of the Sunni Revival into battle. They were the leaders of the public opinion in the mosque and in the market place, and it was they who provided the bridge between the common people and their military overlords.[13] And it was the establishment of madrasas in Damascus and Aleppo but in also small and large cities throughout Syria that produced the jurists – at first hundreds and then thousands – to carry this message; one can effectively speak of the birth of an army of ulama. The ideology of the counter-crusade was built on the platform of madrasas which spread the message of the Sunni Revival, and it was in the madrasas that the alliance between the military princes and the religious classes was forged.

It was also jurists who were the first to sense the chill of the crusader shadow, and to do so at least one generation before others could sense it. They may have struggled to come to terms with the sheer scale of the brutality and violence visited upon them, but one is struck by the astuteness and sophistication of the analyses of the jurists as to why they were being attacked, and in its prescient and objective contemporary assessment of the First Crusade no Muslim source can match the analysis offered by Ali Ibn Tahir al-Sulami, who died in 1106. What makes his views, compiled in the *Kitab al-Jihad* (Book of the Holy War), remarkable was the clarity with which he understood the political picture at a time when the Franks were still besieging the cities of Syria. Al-Sulami clearly understood that this enemy was unlike previous ones, for though there may have been an initial confused belief that the Christian armies were nothing more than another Byzantine foray, al-Sulami was not confused. These were not Byzantines – he labelled the invaders Ifranj (Franks) and not Rum (Byzantines) – and he

saw their aim all too clearly.[14] Al-Sulami warned that 'Jerusalem was the ultimate of their desires',[15] but he also warned that Frankish appetite for conquest would not be sated there, for 'they hope now for certain to make themselves masters of the whole country and to take its inhabitants captive'.[16] Such was the extremity of the danger posed by the Franks that al-Sulami made a striking and unprecedented appeal for the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs to put aside their differences – an extraordinary statement given the bitterness of the Sunni–Shiite conflict. Throughout, there is a sense of urgency in al-Sulami's words; strike now, he urges, while the enemy has a small amount of cavalry and while they are distant from their reinforcements – strike now, before it is too late. He even established a blueprint for Nur al-Din and Saladin when he insisted that the only way the Muslims would triumph was if Syria, Egypt and northern Iraq reconciled their 'old hatreds and secret hostilities'[17] and came together to regain lands lost. A prophetic statement indeed, but like many a prophet al-Sulami was without honour in his own country and his warnings went unheeded,[18] since the military leaders had no intention whatsoever of sacrificing their own political interests for the sake of some nebulous ideal of Islamic solidarity.[19]

Now, in the reign of Nur al-Din, al-Sulami's words found a willing listener. In his seminal work on the life of Nur al-Din, Elisseef summarised the four cornerstones on which his system of belief was based: the revival of jihad, the liberation of Jerusalem, the re-establishment of the political unity of Islam and the diffusion of Sunni orthodoxy.[20] Of particular interest, and very much in al-Sulami's tradition, is a treatise written at the height of Nur al-Din's power by an anonymous religious scholar in Aleppo. The *Bahr al-Favai'd* (Sea of Precious Virtues) offers a contemporary insight into how the ulama of this period viewed the fighting of the holy war, and two fascinating facts emerge. First, the author of the *Bahr al-Fava'id* stresses the fundamental role to be played in the holy war by the religious scholar. 'Beware', he writes, 'lest you think that a ghazi [someone who volunteers to go on jihad] is only he who holds a sword . . . for indeed a scholar who in a mosque . . . holds pen in hand and knows the proofs of Islam is a warrior and his pen is sharper than the sword.'[21] The author even insists that so important is the role of the religious scholar that he should be entitled to a share of the spoils of war. Second, and even though the author was concerned with the struggle with the Franks in Syria, he makes it clear that the struggle against heresy is of far more importance. 'The shedding of

blood of a heretic is the equal of seventy holy wars.' The obsession with the crusades has tended to obscure the fundamental point that the Sunni Revival was, in the words of Irwin, a moral rearmament movement in which both rulers and the religious elite devoted themselves to stamping out corruption and heterodoxy in the Muslim community, as part of a grand jihad which had much wider aims than merely the removal of the Franks from the coastline of Palestine.[22]

It was certainly during Nur al-Din's time that Jerusalem became the focus of the ideological campaign of the counter-crusade, and it was from Damascus that this ideological campaign originated. For Muslims the sanctity of Jerusalem was clear: the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque lay within the city, and it was from Jerusalem that Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad made his Night Journey to the Heavens. They also believe that Jerusalem will be the site on which the Resurrection will take place on the Day of Judgement. Certainly Nasir-i Khusrau, the Persian traveller who visited Jerusalem in 1047, noted the spiritual importance of the city when he remarked that those Muslims who were unable to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca assembled instead in Jerusalem and performed the rites they would have made in Mecca. What is certain is that the yearning for Jerusalem was exploited fully by the ulama who filled Nur al-Din's ranks, and it was they who unceasingly whispered to him about Jerusalem, until their whisperings became a crescendo. There is no doubt that Jerusalem was in their minds before it became implanted in the heart of Nur al-Din,[23] but, once it became implanted, his ambitions became totally focused on Jerusalem.[24]

The education of Saladin

It is true that we know very little about the early life of Saladin, but we know very little about the early life of most medieval men. In an age when a silent acceptance of the will of elders was considered a basic virtue and a sign of good breeding, Saladin's early life can be understood as nothing more than an honourable conformity to this tradition. Saladin himself wrote that 'Children are brought up in the way in which their elders were brought up'. This was an age where adolescence was shortened as much as possible and where the emphasis on early maturity was stressed. Not surprisingly, there are no references to Saladin's birth and early boyhood, and his early days

are, for the most part, a blank.[25] That the study of the Quran should be at the heart of his education was only to be expected, since the Quran was the assimilative force which instinctively united the Muslims, and one imagines that Saladin would have spent many hours memorising as many verses as he could. The study of the Quran as well as the hadith would have given him an excellent knowledge of Arabic, for although by birth he was a Kurd, his education and learning would have been arabised at a very early age. Nevertheless, it is likely that he spoke Kurdish at home. He would also have equally been fluent in Turkish, which was the language of the military. His study of Arabic would not have been limited to the Quran, and he is credited with having learnt by heart the *Hamasah* of Abu Tammam,[26] which is generally considered as one of the greatest anthologies of Arabic literature.

This was a period when a man could not call himself educated if he was not immersed in poetry, for poetry held a position of honour not accorded to any of the other arts. The spoken word well put moved cultivated men as nothing in life was permitted to,[27] and a right thought articulated in the cleverest way decorated the scene as much as did rich robes or flowered gardens.[28] Arabic was considered not just a language, it was an art. Knowledge of its grammatical intricacies was essential and command of its rich vocabulary vital, since just one line of poetry had the power to elevate the position of an individual or a tribe. The Bani Anfulnaqah tribe, for example, were mocked for their name, which translated read the tribe of the nose of the camel. Thanks, however, to one line of poetry by one of their members, embarrassment was transformed to pride: 'There are people who are the nose whilst others are the tails, and who compares the nose of the camel with its tail?' Certainly in Saladin's court could be found some of the most distinguished writers of the twelfth century and some of the most famous poets. None more so were the two men who were closest to him: Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who worked in his chancery and was also the most famous poet of his age and the innovator of a much copied style of prose; and al-Qadi al-Fadil, who headed Saladin's chancery and who was Saladin's closest adviser, as well as a formidable poet. In the case of Saladin himself, it appears that though the poetic licence in him was limited, he was equally steeped in Arabic literature.

An equally important part of an educated man's arsenal was knowledge of the maqamat, a literary term usually translated as assemblies. Composed in the form of rhyming prose, the maqamat were famous – mainly among

learned audiences, though certainly not exclusively so – throughout the Arab world. This popularity was best reflected in the label accorded to the recognised founder of this literary form, al-Hamadhani, who in the tenth century was known as Badi ul-Zaman (Wonder of his Age). Through the adventures of his leading character, the unscrupulous rogue Abul Fatih al-Iskandarani, al-Hamadhani charmed his audience with his brilliance in wit and rhetoric. A century later, al-Harriri took the maqamat to new heights, through which he displayed, through anecdotes relating to a charlatan by the name of Abu Zayd, a brilliant virtuoso of the intricacies Arabic language. The audiences were suitably dazzled, for the maqamat of al-Harriri were widely accepted as the greatest literary treasure of Arabic, after the Quran. The brilliance of the Arabic was combined with anecdotes which were not just daring but on occasion religiously scandalous. This, however, did not dilute their appeal among the audiences, who delighted in the duel between the barbed wit that provoked Islamic sensibilities and the brilliance of the language which ultimately soothed it.[29]

Humour and satire were a noble tradition among poets, who offered a revealing and more human glimpse into a world that often tended to be ignored by those writing for historical posterity. In the case of Saladin the contemporary presence of the North African al-Wahrani, who died in 1179 – a minor poet by his own admission – reminds us that despite the efforts of the pious guardians of the Sunni Revival in general and Saladin's legacy in particular, the bawdy and coarse humour and the witty *mot juste* was never far away.[30] To Saladin's nephew, Taqi ul-Din, therefore, al-Wahrani could claim that his words were 'sweeter than a beating with a prostitute's slipper'.[31] Clearly the two men knew each other well, for, on another occasion, al-Wahrani urged him to give up the nonsense of responsibility and the holy war and to 'settle in the orchards of Damascus, turn from repentance and collect together the sinners of Damascus, the prostitutes of Mosul, the panders of Aleppo and the singing girls of Iraq, delighting the five senses'.[32] Saladin himself was not exempt from al-Wahrani's wit, though he certainly gave as good as he got. Once, when al-Wahrani protested that he was a true believer, Saladin tartly retorted that he would not believe that al-Wahrani was a Muslim 'even if I saw you walking on water'.[33]

Unlike Nur al-Din, whose love of books was famous throughout the Muslim world, from a young age it was clear that Saladin was not suited for

the scholarly life. Indeed it would be fair to say that his knowledge never matched his piety,[34] and it was probably for this reason that he spoke very little about his education later in life. His studies in Islamic science stopped at an early age and he preferred to follow in the path of his father or his uncle rather than that of the scholar. As a young man he visited the great Damascene scholar Ibn Asakir, but he took little from this visit apart from a great respect for the sayings of the Prophet, the hadith.[35] As Ibn Shaddad, who at one stage was as close to Saladin as anyone, diplomatically put it, Saladin knew just enough so that when he spoke to scholars he was capable of saying good things: 'He understood of what one needs to understand'.[36] Saladin's comparative lack of religious education was of course not a critical factor, since he was not going to be judged on how good a scholar he was, but how capable a soldier. Although there were exceptions of men straddling the two worlds of the military and the ulama, these exceptions were rare; among Saladin's contemporaries the name of a fellow Kurd, Isa al-Hakkari, of whom we shall speak later, is the one that springs to mind. A madrasa-trained member of the ulama was someone who devoted his early life to studying in order to pursue a career as a jurist or teacher, while a member of the military aristocracy was always conscious that his reputation would be recognised on the battlefield.

Piety, of course, was not measured by education. When Saladin was about 12, he moved with his father to Damascus, and was introduced to Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri. A scholar of great renown, al-Nishapuri had originally studied in Baghdad and then made his way to Aleppo where – in respect of his great renown – he had two madrasas built for him by Nur al-Din and Shirkuh. Intriguingly we also read that he was used by the two men as an envoy in carrying out diplomatic missions – clearly a role only given to those who could be completely trusted. Ibn Shaddad noted the spiritual influence that al-Nishapuri had over the young Saladin, writing that the scholar taught Saladin a litany of prayers to be recited 'which contained all that he needed'. Although the exact formula of the litany is not known, it would probably have followed the traditional form of a series of invocations, supplications and praise of the Prophet. It appears Saladin persevered with this litany for Ibn Shaddad saw him teaching it to his children, 'sitting with them and teaching it to them while they recited it'. Al-Nishapuri is also of particular interest as he is the first of many of those who would become Saladin's closest companions or advisers who had

studied or were spiritual disciples of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who died in 1166 and who was universally recognised as the spiritual pole (qutb) of his age.

No scholar had more influence, during Saladin's age, than al-Jilani. If al-Ghazali more than anyone else may be said to have prepared the way for the general recognition of sufism, it was al-Jilani, destined to be known as the 'Sultan of the Saints', who was to make the recognition fully operative.[37] We know that the influence of al-Ghazali on al-Jilani was considerable, for he was well versed in al-Ghazali's work, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, and copied parts of it word for word.[38] Born into a family based south of the Caspian sea, al-Jilani was sent, as a youth, to Baghdad to further his religious studies, and he became a jurist, well versed in Hanbali law, before he became initiated into sufism.[39] So impressed were the people of Baghdad by al-Jilani's preaching that he was given a madrasa near one of the gates of the city, and visitors who came from distant lands made a point of attending his sermons and mystical discourses.[40] Often people came the night before so that they could secure a place at the assembly, while others would come on camels and mules and would remain seated on their animals, their necks craned to hear al-Jilani preach. His sermons were attended by viziers, the sultans and even the caliphs, and he was certainly outspoken. Above all al-Jilani believed that for his students and disciples knowledge in itself was not enough and that it was necessary to develop spiritually and to play a role in reviving the moral framework of the Muslim world. Rapidly his students spread across the Muslim world, carrying with them their al-Jilani's teachings. Many of these students in turn became Nur al-Din and Saladin's closest advisers and exerted considerable influence over them.[41] It is therefore likely that the prayers which al-Nishapuri taught Saladin would have been very similar if not identical to the ones taught by al-Jilani.

Perhaps it was al-Nishapuri who instilled a love for sufism in Saladin, since Ibn al-Athir notes Saladin's fondness for sufi gatherings. When the sufis stood up during their chanting and invocations, he stood up with them, and when they sat down he sat down. Ibn Shaddad wrote that over the years Saladin used to practise the daily devotions of the mystic and that it was also common for Saladin to hold an audience for the sufis on Thursday nights. Addas writes of the close collaboration between the the sufi circles, and the Ayyubid princes who formed a 'bond of brotherhood' during this period.[42] One story relating to al-Adil, Saladin's brother, confirms just how strong this bond was and how those closest to Saladin were under the direct or indirect influence of spiritual masters.[43] Originally from Lorca in Andalusia, Atiq Ibn Ahad al-Lawraqi had travelled to Damascus, where he resided with the qadi of the city, Zaki al-Din. At that time Zaki al-Din was in dispute with al-Adil over some possessions, and Zaki al-Din appealed to Atiq to intercede in the matter with al-Adil. 'I will certainly intercede on your behalf with God', he assured him. 'And would you be prepared to meet with al-Adil?' insisted Zaki al-Din. Atiq agreed to this, and went to meet al-Adil, who greeted him warmly 'because a bond of brotherhood had already been established between them'.[44] Al-Adil agreed to return the qadi's possessions, but the same night al-Adil saw himself in a dream surrounded by the keepers of hell, who warned him, 'Unless you keep away from the qadi we will see that you perish!' He woke up in shock and instructed that the qadi should never again be disturbed. When Zaki al-Din went to thank Atiq, the latter replied, 'Did I not tell you that it would have been quite enough for me to speak on your behalf to my sultan? You could have spared me the trouble of having to go and speak to yours!'[45]

Like the majority of Muslim men of his age, Saladin performed the five daily prayers in public – that is to say in a congregation – and he once remarked that it had been years since he prayed on his own. Fasting did not suit his temperament and, in later years, illness forced him to miss days of fasting. He loved to have the Quran recited in his presence, and Ibn Shaddad noted that at night in his room he would ask anyone who was awake to recite two or three verses. He also wrote how he was quick to tears and was often seen in public weeping when the Quran was being recited. If Quranic recitation was heard daily in Saladin's presence, then so were the hadith of the Prophet. As a young man Saladin attended the recitations of hadith made by Ibn Asakir in Damascus and whenever a hadith scholar visited him he summoned his children to listen, bidding them to sit down at the scholar's feet as a sign of respect. Even during battle, hadith would be read out: 'The reading was held while we were all in the saddle', wrote Ibn Shaddad, 'sometimes advancing and sometimes at halt between the ranks of the two armies'. The study and recitation of the hadith of the Prophet formed a core element in the education of Muslims. Not only did they constitute the most important basis of Islamic law, but their public recital on feast days during the months of Rajab, Shaban and Ramadan, and on other special occasions, was a central feature of popular religious celebration among Muslims, who drew no distinction between instruction

and devotion.[46] Matters of jurisprudence may have been beyond the abilities of the military, but the listening to hadith was an act of piety that was shared by all, for it was commonly acknowledged that their public recitation possessed extraordinary efficacy and power. So, for example, when a plague struck Cairo in 1388, the chief qadi of the city called together a group of men to al-Azhar to read the Sahih of al-Bukhari and pray for deliverance. Three days later the recitation was repeated, this time using children and orphans.[47]

As someone who was born to serve in the military, physical activities formed a crucial part in Saladin's upbringing. Ibn Jubayr noted how Saladin's sons rode out every evening to play polo and practise archery, and one assumes that Saladin followed a similar routine when younger. Certainly he would have been an excellent horseman and he himself commented that 'When I am on my horse all pain ceases until I dismount'. Well-versed in the genealogy of Arab horses, he probably spent as much time on horseback as he did on his feet, and the skill of firing a bow while at full gallop was one that he must have often practised. One imagines Shirkuh watching carefully and admonishing him for not pulling the arrow all the way back to his chest. Constantly he would remind him that the arrow had to hit the mark whether he was advancing or retreating, and never forget to add that the most valuable wisdom taught in the military manuals was how to obtain victory without engaging the enemy. This was an important lesson for Saladin and his brothers and one that they clearly adhered to; as al-Maqrizi writes in his obituary of al-Adil, Saladin's brother, he 'did not see it as wise to engage his enemy openly, preferring rather in his designs to use guile and deception'. Hunting was also a favourite pastime and Saladin enjoyed gazelle hunting in the plains outside Damascus.

Saladin spent his time between Damascus, where his father and Nur al-Din resided, and Aleppo, where Shirkuh was deputy in Nur al-Din's absence, and it seems that Nur al-Din used Saladin to carry messages between him and Shirkuh.[48] For a while Saladin developed a closer relationship with his uncle than with his father. Perhaps his uncle's gruff manner and military exploits impressed him more than Ayyub's diplomatic nature, although as he grew older it would become increasingly clear that he was his father's son.

Chapter 4

The Battle for Egypt

Whomsoever has not seen Cairo will never appreciate the degree and power of Islam.

Ibn Khaldun, fourteenth-century historian

With the fall of Damascus to Nur al-Din, the role of Egypt suddenly assumed supreme importance, for it was not on the banks of the Jordan but of the Nile that Jerusalem would be won or lost. Although it has been argued that the fall of the Latin Kingdom was due to its failure to capture Damascus or Aleppo, in reality it was its inability to negate the threat from Egypt that sealed its fate. For the Franks it was imperative that they not suffer a Muslim pincer movement launched from Egypt in the south and Iraq from the north; encircled they would then be ruthlessly pushed back towards the coast. And so, in order to safeguard their hold on Palestine and Syria, the Franks had to conquer Egypt or at the very least ensure that it did not fall to Nur al-Din. Aleppo and Damascus were now under his control, Edessa had been lost, Antioch shorn of half its territory, the eastern marches of Tripoli had been overrun and the defences of the Kingdom of Jerusalem seriously weakened. Egypt could not be lost. On this premise was based the strategy of the Latin Kingdom now under the rule of a new king, Amalric. Tall and handsome with a thick blonde beard, his speech was afflicted by the occasional stammer[1] but his vision was clear; he and his advisers did not consider that trying to live at peace with Nur al-Din was an option,[2] and it

was imperative, no matter what, that Egypt did not fall to him. Before his accession, Amalric had been the count of Jaffa and Ascalon, and the keystone of his policy rested on the control of Egypt. When Ascalon had fallen in 1153, so had Egypt's last bastion against a Frankish invasion of the country. And indeed one year after the fall of Ascalon a Norman fleet sacked Tinnins, and the year following that, in 1155, Alexandria and Damietta were attacked by the Normans. Then in 1161 the crusaders once again entered Egyptian territory and had to be bought off by the enormous sum of an annual tribute of 160,000 dinars. Amalric's fear about the threat of Egypt was well founded, for it was an offensive from there that ultimately helped seal the kingdom's fate. The master of the Templars Bertrand of Blanquefort had once said that his greatest fear was that a single Muslim prince would 'reunite the two most powerful realms, Cairo and Damascus, and abolish the very name of Christian'. It was perhaps fortunate for Blanquefort that he died in 1169 and did not live long enough to see his worst fear realised.

For Nur al-Din, Egypt was also important, and for reasons that were not simply strategic. Admittedly he understood that with its wealth and boundless resources he would be able to drive the Franks out of Syria and Palestine. For him the fall of Ascalon also had serious repercussions, for the city had acted as a sort of buffer state between Muslims and Christians and its capture by the Franks had endangered the commerce with Egypt. Since the Latin control of the coastal cities meant that Muslim Syria was effectively cut off from the coast, Nur al-Din understood that if the Franks controlled Egypt then Muslim Syria would be ruined. According to Runciman, it was Shirkuh, more than any other Muslim, who fully understood that the conquest of Egypt was the necessary preliminary to the conquest of Palestine, and it was Shirkuh's nephew who reaped the harvest of his persistence. Nur al-Din was equally aware of the importance of restoring Egypt to the Sunni fold; for renascent Sunnism, as we have seen, the greatest threat ideologically, if no longer politically, was that posed by the Ismaili Fatimid caliphate. Nur al-Din had carried with great gusto the Sunni message into Syria, but now the message had to be carried into the heart of Egypt. Ibn Hubayra, the vizier whom Nur al-Din admired, urged it and the Abbasid caliph demanded it. For Nur al-Din, however, there was an even greater concern, for he believed the loss of Egypt to the Franks would mean the end of Islam,[3] and extreme as that statement may appear to be it was not

without foundation. The main reason for this was that the Hijaz depended almost totally on Egypt, and the occupation of Egypt to a non-Muslim power would mean the fall of the Arabian coastal region of the Red Sea and the ultimate loss of Mecca and Medina. Twice when the crusaders attacked Egypt in the first half of the thirteenth century panic seized the Egyptians, who were convinced that this was the end of their religion.[4] In addition, the loss of Egypt would mean that the Maghrib would be cut off from the eastern Muslim world and the Franks could make direct contact with the Christians of Nubia and Abyssinia. Egypt, in short, could not fall to the Franks.

For both parties, enraptured by the staggering stories of Fatimid wealth, the economic benefits of capturing Egypt were enormous. Nasir-i Khusrau, who visited the land in 1047, wrote that all the 20,000 shops in Cairo paid a monthly rent of between two and ten dinars to the Fatimid caliph. The early Arab conquerors of the seventh century were amazed, and described Egypt as a 'storehouse of corn and riches and blessings of every kind'. With the spread of Islam and trade in Africa, regular supplies of gold from Senegal and Nubia began to reach Egypt, thus further adding to its wealth. Shirkuh described Egypt as the milk cow of their treasury, and as a military man he would have been impressed by the fact that its wealth meant that for every army raised by Damascus, Egypt was capable of raising three. 'Suffice to say that Syria, in spite of its importance, is only a rural sub-district when compared to Egypt', wrote al-Muqaddasi, the Jerusalem geographer at the end of the tenth century. If the ships arriving in Fustat had reached his birthplace Jerusalem, he noted, they could have removed in one voyage the whole of the town, with its population, trees and stones, to another place. And afterwards people would say, 'Once upon a time there was a town here'.[5] For their part the Franks were equally dazzled by the stories of the treasures that could be found, and they had assiduously compiled a list of Egyptian villages and the incomes derived from them. Runciman's description of the visit of Hugh of Caesarea to meet the Fatimid caliph could well have been inspired from *The Thousand and One Nights*:

> *They were led past colonnades and fountains and gardens where the court menageries and aviaries were kept, through hall after hall, heavy with hangings of silk and golden thread, studded with jewels, till at last a golden curtain was raised, to show the boy-caliph seated veiled on his golden throne.*[6]

The Fatimids: the sick man of the Nile

There was a time when the Red Sea was a Fatimid lake, part of an empire which stretched across most of North Africa and which threatened to overthrow the Sunni Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. But that time had passed; North Africa had broken away and so too had Sicily. As for the Red Sea, the only support came from distant Yemen. With the fall of Ascalon, the Fatimids lost their last hold on Palestine and the caliph found himself the ruler of a dynasty which had, in the words of the contemporary satirist al-Wahrani, been reduced to the scheming of 'old women'.[7] Ismailism may have been the state religion of Egypt, but it was little else. Lacking a power base, the Fatimids had dissolved in a sea of Sunnis. On the eve of Saladin's entry into Egypt, 85–90 per cent of the population was either Sunni Muslims or Christians, and it is even questionable if the Ismaili population, excluding the army, was larger than the Jewish one.[8] Ismaili millennial expectations were weakened, in addition, by religious schisms. And these were exacerbated by the actions of some caliphs, which appalled and alienated their Sunni subjects while provoking internal dissension. On occasion their actions baffled the Egyptians and lent little credence to their Islamic claims. One example was al-Aziz, who died in 996, choosing the sister of the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem to be his wife, or refusing to punish a Muslim who had converted to Christianity. But these actions were to pall into insignificance compared to those of his son, al-Hakim, which, if nothing else, proves that every enduring dynasty will eventually produce a Caligula. Indifferent at best to their fate, few mourned the passing of the Fatimids – in Ibn al-Athir's mocking words 'there was not so much as the butting of two goats'.

We have spoken above about the crusader thunderbolt that struck the Muslim world, but perhaps for some Muslims its arrival was not unexpected. Referring to the Fatimids, Hillenbrand, for one, is clear that 'one group of Muslims knew about the coming of the crusades in good time but . . . had their own reasons for not spreading the information and trying to defend Islamic territory more effectively'.[9] Clearly there was early contact, indeed collusion, between the crusaders and the Fatimids, and it seems the first contact was made as early as 1098 when the crusaders were besieging the city of Antioch. In the words of Ehrenkreutz:

After several months of painful siege operations at the impregnable fortress of Antioch, the forces of the Crusaders reached the brink of exhaustion. It was at that moment, in March 1098, that the Fatimids appeared on the scene, not as an army bringing relief to the besieged Muslim garrison but as a diplomatic mission proposing a deal to the Crusaders, involving a partition of Syria at the expense of the Saljuqid foe.[10]

The Fatimids, it was announced, were prepared to enter into a pact of neutrality. The reason was clear enough: they viewed the Sunni Seljuq Turks as a greater enemy than the crusaders. In 1071 the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan had actually planned an invasion of Egypt, when he became distracted by the advance of the Byzantine army. It was clear that the Fatimids were not entirely opposed to a Frankish presence in the region, which they mistakenly believed was part of a limited Byzantine campaign. In that sense they misunderstood the intentions of the Franks, and Fatimid–crusader collaboration was quickly followed by Fatimid disillusionment.[11] In the words of a contemporary Muslim historian, they regretted this fact only after it was no longer useful to regret it.

The land of the Nile seethed with political intrigue. On the one hand there was the Fatmid Ismaili caliph, who was supreme ruler in principle; on the other the vizier, who was supreme ruler in fact. In between there raged a sea of shifting loyalties, political intrigue and deadly palace coups. The most important consideration, indeed the only consideration, was power – how to seize it and how to hold it, and power held no religious beliefs; the vizierate went to whoever could seize it. All that mattered was to protect your back against the machinations of the court, emasculate your enemies and keep a wary eye on your allies. Historians have correctly labelled the last years of Fatimid rule as a period of bewildering political intrigue, but sometimes a simple fact tells us all that we need to know about a complex situation: of the 15 viziers who ruled Egypt between 1101 and 1171, only three, including Saladin, died a natural death.

Under Ismaili rule they may have been, but the Sunnis of Egypt were not cut off from the wider Muslim concerns in Syria and elsewhere. An important example here is Alexandria, where the imprint of Ismailism was far less than that on the capital;[12] it was the Muslims of Alexandria who were the first to feel the change in the air with the arrival not just of the refugees

from Palestine, who fled to Egypt after the fall of Ascalon in 1153, but also the spirit of Sunni orthodoxy, which reinvigorated the community, making it more conscious of itself, militant and willing to challenge its foes. Goitein's research shows an increase in anti-semitic activities in Alexandria during the late Fatimid period – perhaps a consequence of a more militant Sunni orthodoxy.[13] In addition, to the city-port flocked merchants, students, tourists and soldiers of fortune.[14] Not surprisingly therefore it was in Alexandria that the first madrasas in Egypt appeared.[15] The first madrasa in Egypt was the work of Abu Bakr al-Turtushi, who died in 1126 and whose life offers a flavour of not only how far scholars travelled but how quickly the ideas of the Sunni Revival spread. Born in Tortossa in Spain, he travelled to Baghdad where he studied at the Nizamiyya, and where he met Nizam ul-Mulk. From Baghdad al-Turtushi travelled to Damascus and then to Alexandria where, inspired by what he saw in Baghdad, he established a madrasa in 1098, and where he taught for the next 30 years. Before long he established around him a following which was so popular that on one of his walks he was accompanied by 360 students.[16] It was not very long before al-Turtushi made his presence felt and he began insisting that the Ismailis stop meddling in Sunni affairs and issuing legal opinions which went against the official Fatimid Ismaili directives. Given his immense popularity among the Sunnis of Alexandria, there was little the authorities could do; not even 'stop him cutting his nails'.[17] In Alexandria at least, the Sunnis were able to do as they pleased.[18]

Slowly, inexorably, the Fatimid caliph was being pushed into a corner by a people over whom he ruled but who at best were indifferent to his ideology. In addition, from Alexandria but also elsewhere a new Sunnism was emerging which questioned the very legitimacy of the Fatimid rule. To survive, the caliph had to intrigue and act, and in doing so he grudgingly sacrificed his doctrine and ideology for political expediency. The Fatimids, in short, were headed toward total extinction.[19] It is in this light that one needs to comprehend the actions of the Fatimid imam al-Hafiz, who in 1135 acted in a manner which was as dramatic as it was shocking to Muslim sensibilities: he appointed Bahram, a Christian Armenian, as vizier. In doing so he calculated that a Christian would not undermine further the Ismaili nature of the country. This was a considered strategy, since under the Fatimids there was little pressure on Christians to convert to Islam[20] and it appears that some Christians reverted to their original faith – a fact which is

perhaps demonstrated by the drop in the adoption of Muslim names in Egypt during this period.[21] It was a daring move by al-Hafiz, bold and dramatic, but the caliph had badly read the mood of the people over whom he was meant to rule. Although in the past there had been Armenian viziers, they had converted to Islam, but Bahram had no such intention. With this desperate appointment, al-Hafiz signalled that the heart had gone out of the Fatimid ideology,[22] since the Fatimids had always claimed for themselves an Islamic heritage, one in which the Prophet and his family – the ahl al-bayt – held a special position. Now the appointment of a Christian vizier was received with disbelief by the Muslims and the news that Bahram had close ties with the Armenian church – he was the nephew of the Armenian catholicos Gregory II and the brother of the first Armenian catholicos of Egypt – added to the Sunni unease. As vizier, Bahram made a point of employing Armenians and Christians in the administration, which meant the dismissal of Muslim officials.[23] Increasingly uneasy, the Muslims suspected that Bahram was in contact with Christian states, and it does appear that those suspicions were well founded. There is no doubt that the Sunnis feared the Christians in Egypt far more than they feared the Ismailis, and evidence shows that secret negotiations were entered into between Bahram and Roger II, the Norman King of Sicily, who was hoping to reunite his kingdom with the principality of Antioch and who needed Bahram's support among the Armenians. This was not the only time that Bahram acted in favour of the crusaders, for it was due to his intervention that Geoffrey of Esch, a knight who was captured with around 300 of his men, was released. This followed a visit to Cairo of the Armenian patriarch of Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that the Armenian patriarch fled Egypt in 1171, the year that Saladin assumed the vizierate.

As work by Kedar and Ephrat has shown, there were several incidences during this period involving conversions of Muslims to Christianity.[24] In one example Ibn al-Athir tells of the qadi of the town of Buzaa (near Aleppo) who converted to the religion of the Franks who were besieging his town in 1137. Ibn al-Athir notes with dismay that 400 of the town's notables followed their qadi's example. In another, Abu Shama records an episode where the Christian inhabitants of Damascus, who had converted to Islam, reverted back to their original faith when the Franks laid siege to the city in 1136. The dates are interesting, for it was during this period that the Muslims in Egypt felt most threatened by Bahram's policies. In their minds

the events in Syria and Egypt were not unrelated. What is clear was that the backdrop of the crusaders, which brought expansionist Christian armies into Syria and to the borders of Egypt, impacted greatly on Muslims and increased their fears concerning the seemingly pervasive Christian influence in Egypt, which led some to believe that 'the possible eventual Christianization of the country, perhaps with foreign support would have been quite natural'.[25]

Bahram's appointment to the vizierate was followed by an outburst of anti-Christian feelings. A vehement Sunni, Ridwan, went as far as calling for a jihad against the Christian influence in Egypt. The call was successful; Ridwan was appointed vizier and Bahram retired to a monastery, where he died a couple of years later in 1140.[26] Ridwan's vizierate undoubtedly increased the political power and presence of the Sunnis in Egypt, and his anti-Christian purge, which forbade Christians to work in important ministries, was a popular move that won him support. His next step, however, clearly showed how he was in tune with the thinking of the age – he chose to build a madrasa. Whereas the madrasa built by al-Turtushi can be seen as the initiative of an individual scholar directly influenced by Nizam ul-Mulk, Ridwan was a vizier and his madrasa – the second one built in Egypt – was as much a political act as it was a pious one. Not surprisingly Ridwan chose to build his madrasa in Alexandria, even though it was a city in which he had never lived. This was a logical choice; the city-port was staunchly Sunni and he also wanted the leading Maliki scholar Ibn Awf to become its professor. For nearly 50 years Ibn Awf taught at the madrasa and to him flocked hundreds of students, including Saladin. But there was also a more urgent political reason for the madrasa, and that was that Ridwan was desperately in need of Sunni jurists who could assume positions in his government in order to free him, at least to some degree, from reliance on the rival communities, above all the Christians, in order to govern the country.[27] This was one of the cornerstones of Nizam ul-Mulk's policies when he established his madrasas, and its importation into Egypt was a clear sign that the ideas which had originated in the east were reaching the land of the Nile.

Saladin was not the first Sunni vizier of Fatimid Egypt – in fact he was not even the first Kurdish one. A Shafii Sunni Kurd, Ibn Sallar, had been the governor of Alexandria before he became vizier, and in 1151 he established a madrasa for the leading Shafii scholar, al-Silafi. This was the first Shafii madrasa in Egypt and signalled an official recognition for that madhab. If

Ibn Awf was the foremost Maliki scholar in Egypt, then there was no question that al-Silafi was the most outstanding Shafii one – and perhaps the greatest scholarly personality of the age in Egypt.[28] His fame and prestige grew and spread to the extent that it seems that everyone visiting Alexandria went to see him.[29] By the time he died in 1180, al-Silafi had taught hadith for close to 60 years and had acquired hundreds of students. Collectively known as the 'disciples of al-Silafi', they carried his teachings across the Islamic world. Thus Ibn Awf and al-Silafi were the two intellectual giants of this period in Egypt, who taught, guided and nurtured hundreds of students who would form the core of Saladin's adminstration in Egypt.

It has been commonly assumed that the reasons madrasas were built in Egypt was to combat Ismailism. And yet it appears that neither Ridwan nor Ibn Sallar could not have been less interested in that goal. In reality either man could have toppled the Fatimid caliphate, and there was a moment when Ridwan thought seriously of doing so and sought legal advice on this matter. Ibn Awf was one of those whose opinion was asked, but his response was a non-committal one. Perhaps neither Ridwan nor Ibn Sallar felt it mattered, for the tide had turned firmly in favour of the Sunnis. When Ibn Ruzzik, a Twelver Shiite vizier, marched on Cairo to seize power, he and his troops wore black and carried black banners; ostensibly this was out of sorrow for the caliph who had been murdered, but only a fool would have failed to notice the symbolism – black was the colour of the Abbasid Sunnis. A Twelver Shiite vizier seizing power in a land ruled by an Ismaili Shiite caliph, and having to dress in the colour of Sunnis to win popular support – there could be no clearer signal that the era of the Fatimids had drawn to a close. Pockets of Ismaili resentment of course remained, none more so than the caliph himself who, it was said, was fanatically opposed to the Sunnis. But he could do little about it, for they were everywhere. Even when one of his slave girls needed to be bled, the physician turned out to be a Sunni.[30]

It was the desperate gamble of the Fatimid vizier, Shawar, which finally extinguished the last gasps of the sick man of the Nile. In December 1163 he travelled to Damascus to appeal for Nur al-Din's help against a rival. To tempt him, Shawar offered Nur al-Din a third of the Egyptian revenue as annual tribute. For a while Nur al-Din hesitated, for an Egyptian venture was not one to be embarked on lightly, and he could see no reason why he should support Shawar's claim to the vizierate, but then he decided to

despatch an army under Shirkuh, who had risen to become his commander-in-chief. With Shirkuh travelled Saladin, now aged 27, as his adjutant. The fact that Shirkuh chose Saladin over his sons shows how much faith he had in him – although for the first quarter century of Saladin's life we know almost next to nothing about him, from the moment that he accompanied Shirkuh's army into Egypt, his rise would be meteoric.

The story of Shawar's invitation may have been the *casus belli* of the Syrian campaign but what is less known was the relationship between Nur al-Din and the Sunnis of Egypt, for a cautious Nur al-Din would not have simply relied on the vizier's promises. He did not know Egypt well and he would certainly not have sent his army 'blind' without some knowledge about what to expect, or at the very least the lay of the political land. Shirkuh had boasted that there 'were no men' in Egypt, but Nur al-Din knew that the dangers could not be underestimated, for over the years he had developed useful contacts in Egypt who acted as his eyes and ears and who passed on valuable information. Their role – shadowy and secretive by its nature – has largely been overlooked by historians, but not only would Sunni elements loyal to Nur al-Din 'prepare' the way for Shirkuh's invasion, they would also be instrumental in securing Saladin's position in power. In Zein Ibn Naja we have one of the most intriguing and enigmatic personalities of the period. A Damascene by birth, he lived well into his nineties and became one of Saladin's closest confidants. Intriguingly we know that as a young man he travelled to Baghdad, where he became a disciple of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and developed a reputation as a preacher (waiz). It is worth relating the following events for though they are confusing, one suspects that they are deliberately so. We are told that Ibn Naja asked al-Jilani's permission to leave Baghdad for Egypt, and al-Jilani agreed to this and informed him 'You will reach Damascus and you will find there an army ready to invade Egypt. Say to them: you will not conquer it on this occasion. Is it not better for you to turn back so that you conquer it on another occasion?'[31] While in Damascus Ibn Naja came across Shirkuh, and informed him of what al-Jilani had told him. He then headed for Egypt where, we are told, he informed the Fatimid caliph of the approach of the army, but assured him that the invasion would not succeed. When indeed Shirkuh was forced to turn back, Ibn Naja relates that the Fatimid caliph recalled his words and took him in his confidence and 'showed him his secrets'.[32] As it stands, the story simply does not make sense. Are we being

asked to believe that a Hanbali disciple of al-Jilani, who was opposed to the Fatimid Ismailis, could so easily gain the confidence of the Fatimid caliph? And what can one make of al-Jilani's enigmatic message?

Intriguingly, while in Egypt Ibn Naja went to visit Uthman Ibn Marzuq al-Qurshi, who was based around the Amr Ibn al-As mosque and was widely recognised as a sufi shaykh with many blessings. Ibn Marzuq himself was a Hanbali and was also associated with al-Jilani, with whom he was in correspondence.[33] Baffingly, Ibn Marzuq asked Ibn Naja if he knew of a man called Shirkuh, and then proceeded to tell him the same story that al-Jilani had related: that Shirkuh's approach would fail and that this was not the opportune time. Ibn Naja then proceeded to Damascus to inform Nur al-Din about his conversation with Ibn Marzuq, and Nur al-Din ordered him to keep this information quiet. Clearly, Ibn Marzuq was acting in some capacity for Nur al-Din and messages were being passed – via Ibn Naja – between Damascus and the Sunni elements in Egypt, who were acting as his informants. Ibn Marzuq's warning therefore has to be viewed in this light – that the political situation in Egypt was not yet favourable – and it is in the same light that one needs to view al-Jilani's message, for it was clear that those in Baghdad as well as those in Damascus were preoccupied with the affairs of Egypt. The very fact that Ibn Marzuq asked about Shirkuh is proof that he knew of the approaching Sunni army.

There is no doubt that Ibn Naja's success in infiltrating the highest echelons of the Fatimids, where he gained the direct audience of the caliph, can lead to only one conclusion – that he was acting as an informant for Nur al-Din. And for Saladin as well, for Ibn Naja would quickly establish himself as one of his closest advisers in Egypt. Saladin kept Ibn Naja close to him and constantly asked his advice. He used to address him as Amr Ibn al-As, after the companion of the Prophet who conquered Egypt, thereby viewing Ibn Naja's endeavours in restoring Sunnism to Egypt in the same light as those of Amr. To be compared to one of the companions of the Prophet demonstrated how highly Saladin viewed Ibn Naja. As we shall see, in the moment of his greatest triumph Saladin did not forget him. In addition to Ibn Marzuq, and also based in Fustat, was Abu Abdallah al-Kizani, who was a respected sufi and a recognised poet. He was also a charismatic preacher and had a following, based around the Mosque of Amr Ibn al-As. Al-Kizani maintained close contact with Shirkuh and Saladin, and it is said that his poetry found favour with Saladin. What was clear to Nur al-Din was that it

was imperative to win over the support of men like Ibn Marzuq and al-Kizani, who were capable of generating massive popular support within the country, and Shirkuh made a point of visiting both men during his first campaign. Of al-Kizani we shall hear once more, but this time in the most macabre of circumstances.

Shirkuh's campaign

It was against this background of furtive messages and travelling informants that Nur al-Din despatched Shirkuh to Egypt. The details of the three expeditions which Shirkuh would lead into Egypt over the next four years are well documented[34] and, salient facts apart, need not concern us greatly. Although we assume that Saladin accompanied his uncle on this first foray into Egypt, we have no evidence that he did. Surprisingly, Saladin himself makes no mention of it and Ibn al-Athir – who was notoriously anti-Saladin – hints that he remained behind in Syria. Given the senior role that he played in the future campaigns, it seems highly likely that Saladin did travel to Egypt, though he was probably not given an independent command. No matter, over Saladin's early life the mist clung stubbornly. As Shirkuh's army departed Damascus, two men stood aside watching it take its leave while reciting aloud from a text of Ibn Batta, a Hanbali jurist who died in 997, in which the virtues of the Prophet are extolled. The two jurists were Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama and his cousin Abd al-Ghani. The elder of the two, Muwaffaq al-Din, had recently returned to Damascus from Baghdad, where he had been personally initiated by al-Jilani, who had invested him with his sufi cloak. In Damascus Muwaffaq al-Din established himself as the city's greatest Hanbali jurist and became one of Saladin's closest advisers, riding with him on his military campaigns, including the battle of Hattin in 1187.

As for the campaign itself, it is best labelled as a frustrating success. Nur al-Din had sent Shirkuh at the head of a small exploratory force rather than a large army, and this alarmed Shawar, who accompanied Shirkuh. 'You have tricked us!' he railed, for the Egyptian army that blocked their path was much larger, but Shirkuh dismissed his worries, for he had little faith in the fighting capabilities of the Egyptians: 'Most of them are peasants who are gathered together by the beating of a drum and are scattered by that of a stick.' And Shirkuh was proven correct, for having departed Damascus in

April 1164, Shawar was within a month reinstated as vizier. He had, however, no intention of fulfilling his promise to Nur al-Din, and he now offered Shirkuh 30,000 dinars to return home. One imagines Shirkuh snarling at such an offer and demanding that Shawar pay one-third of the country's revenue, as had been agreed. Seeing that Shirkuh was not going to budge, Shawar then took an action that would ultimately spell his doom: he invited Amalric and the Latin Kingdom to come to his aid. Amalric, already alarmed by Shirkuh's presence in Egypt, wasted no time, and marched with his army with haste. In the meantime Shirkuh had moved to Bilbais, where in July 1164 he was besieged by a combined Fatimid–Frankish force. How seriously Amalric pressed the siege is not clear, and perhaps he was distracted by Nur al-Din, who had taken advantage of Amalric's move into Egypt. To distract the Franks and relieve the siege of Bilbais, Nur al-Din captured the castle of Harim which lay between Antioch and Aleppo, and in August 1164 crushed a Frankish army and captured Bohemond III of Antioch, Joscelin III of Edessa and Raymond III of Tripoli, who were all thrown into a prison in Aleppo. Nur al-Din continued to press and in October 1164 he besieged Banias, which fell. This greatly alarmed Amalric, who was troubled by its loss and that of Harim, and who wished to retire from Egypt. In any case it appears that Shirkuh did not suffer unduly during the siege and, since his army was not a match for Amalric's, a settlement was reached and by October he was back in Damascus.

Shirkuh returned to Syria smarting by what had taken place. He now plotted revenge on Shawar and his duplicitous behaviour, and for two years he prepared his forces and tried to convince Nur al-Din of the merits of a second campaign. Nur al-Din, however, still hesitated and Shirkuh, knowing the man he served, wrote to the Abbasid caliph, requesting him to urge Nur al-Din to restore Sunnism to Egypt. The caliph's enthusiastic response naturally found favour with Nur al-Din, as Shirkuh had expected.[35] But it was not revenge that motivated Nur al-Din but the fear that Egypt would fall to the Franks. As for Saladin, it was during this period, in 1165, that he was appointed by Nur al-Din to the post of shihna (police-chief) of Damascus. However he did not remain in that position for long: he appears to have resigned out of frustration at the interference and stubbornness of the qadi, with whom he had to work closely and who was none other than Zengi and Nur al-Din's favourite Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri. Saladin was

clearly not the first or last to be so frustrated, since the satirist and poet al-Wahrani pictures angels complaining on the Day of Judgement that Kamal al-Din was insisting on a day for himself.[36]

In 1167, with Saladin definitely by his side, Shirkuh was finally ordered to move. A vicious sandstorm greeted them on the way, which nearly laid Shirkuh's plans to waste, but disturbing news also greeted them: Amalric's army was already in Cairo, for the king had been informed of Shirkuh's advance and had written to warn Shawar. In return, he had been offered 400,000 dinars to defend the Fatimid caliphate from Syrian encroachment. The news of Amalric's presence alarmed Shirkuh and he turned to the one city of whose loyalty he could be certain: he wrote to Alexandria asking for their help. The response was immediate and positive, and the Alexandrians threw off any nominal Fatimid loyalty they may have had and, placing the city in the hands of Najm al-Din Ibn Masal, who was the son of a previous vizier, they rose up in rebellion. Arms were gathered, as was money, ready to be used in Shirkuh's service. The message of support was delivered to Shirkuh by Sharif al-Idrisi of Aleppo, who happened to have been in Alexandria at the time, and who one assumes knew Shirkuh personally.

Leaving a regiment of Franks in Cairo – to the scandal of the Sunnis who were shocked by the fact that infidels now protected them – Amalric set off immediately in pursuit of Shirkuh, who had retired as far south as Ashmunain, and it was there, at Babain in March 1167, that the two armies clashed. A war veteran, Shirkuh had studied his enemy well and had calculated that Amalric would employ his main strength, which was the cavalry charge, for it had been used previously against the Fatimid armies with devastating success. But Shirkuh had noted that the charge went only in one direction and could not be easily reversed and surmised that, confronted by the light Turkish cavalry, it would have problems. The key was to get out of the way of the charge and then attack it from the flanks, and for that to succeed it was necessary to employ one of the favourite Muslim tactics – the feigned retreat to suck in the charge. To succeed, it had to be well executed, for the timing was crucial; if the retreat was too quick there was the danger that the enemy could drive through the Muslim army, while if the retreat was delayed for too long the flanks could themselves be sucked into battle. As commander-in-chief it was Shirkuh who would give the signal for the flanks to attack, but, above all, he needed a commander who could control the centre and time the feigned retreat correctly. In the heat of battle it

would be necessary to keep a cool head, and Shirkuh now turned to Saladin to assume that responsibility. For the first time, Saladin emerges as an individual in his own right.

On the eve of the battle men from Alexandria arrived to fight with Shirkuh, though they were clearly not of the same quality as Shirkuh's own men, since sources claim that many died in the ensuing battle. As far as the battle itself was concerned, Shirkuh's tactics had been well worked out for, as he had expected, Amalric charged the centre and Saladin, on his uncle's instructions, made the feigned retreat. The Muslim cavalry closed in, and the army, led by Shawar and Amalric, suffered many casualties. The day belonged to Shirkuh, who proved why he was regarded in such high esteem, but the victory had not been a decisive one and neither army suffered major losses. Shirkuh then headed north, where he was welcomed by Alexandria and its governor, al-Rashid Ibn al-Zubayr. There he was certain of a base, arms and money. Ibn al-Zubayr is an intriguing character whose story is worth telling. Originally from Aswan, he went to Alexandria, where he studied under al-Silafi. He was clearly a man of many talents, especially poetry, and this brought him to the attention of the Fatimids who, in 1144, sent him to the Yemen as ambassador and religious propagandist. This appears strange, as it is likely that since he had studied under al-Silafi he was a Sunni, though this is nowhere explicitly stated. The reaction of the Yemenis adds to this confusion. When Ibn al-Zubayr arrived in the Yemen, some of the poets there wrote a verse to the Faimid caliph with the line, 'You sent to us the banner of the Rightly Guided, but he is a black banner'. This verse could be interpreted literally, since Ibn al-Zubayr, who was originally from Aswan, could have had black skin. But there is a deeper interpretation, which was that their banner was white (the colour of the Fatimids) and that the black banner was of course that of the Abbasids. This implies that Ibn al-Zubayr was a Sunni, but the mystery remains: could the Fatimids have despatched a Sunni to propagate their religion? On his return from the Yemen, he was placed in charge of the diwans of Alexandria, but when Shirkuh invaded Egypt, he openly supported him – support which would ultimately cost him his life.

While in Alexandria Shirkuh pondered what his next step would be. Amalric and Shawar were closing in fast on the city and it was clear what their strategy was: they would starve it out, for the Frankish fleet was already blockading the port. Despite his military victory at Babain, Shirkuh found

himself in a precarious position. If he remained in Alexandria then the siege of the city would be gradually tightened until it fell, but if he abandoned it and retreated to Syria he would lose his only loyal base and with it any hopes of ever capturing Egypt. The people of Alexandria had stood by him bravely and he knew that Shawar would show them no pity. Retreat was therefore not an option. The choice that he finally settled on was brave and daring: he would split his already small force and he would slip out of Alexandria, while there was still time, in order to challenge and distract Amalric's army – even if he was incapable of defeating it. The other part of his army would remain in Alexandria and hold the city until he or Nur al-Din could come to its aid. To hold Alexandria for him, a task which would certainly entail severe hardship, he turned to Saladin, in whom he had the utmost confidence.

The emergence of Saladin and the siege of Alexandria

'What I went through in Alexandria,' Saladin later recalled, 'I shall never forget.' Aged 30 and in charge of 1,000 men, Saladin now endured his sternest challenge. Of the loyalty of his and Shirkuh's men he had no doubt, but would the people of Alexandria hold firm? Admittedly they had rallied to the cause and had fought with enthusiasm, but would their resolve remain strong once the food ran out? Of what stuff were the Egyptians made? Despite their willingness, the Alexandrians were by nature traders, desperate to resume their trading, and not fighters, and Saladin knew that he could not rely on them. Enthusiasm – no matter how well intended – could never compensate for lack of military discipline. No matter, Saladin was determined to hold the city. Equally determined that it should fall was Shawar, for he could not afford to tolerate an open rebellion of such magnitude – Alexandria and its people needed to be taught a painful lesson. And so the siege tightened and orchards were cut down to construct siege engines, which towered over the city. Catapults capable of throwing large stones over great distances were now used, and they wreaked great damage. William of Tyre writes that Amalric ordered that all messengers leaving the besieged city be intercepted and thoroughly questioned. For three months, from April to July 1167, the people of Alexandria endured hunger, but they held firm, since many of them were themselves refugees from Ascalon and

they understood what was at stake. Shawar then tried to test the city's loyalty and despatched a message: 'Surrender Saladin', he urged, but the response was swift and reflected the mindset of the besieged city: 'God forbid we surrender Muslims to the Franks and Ismailis'. Meanwhile fresh Christian forces, accompanied by Archbishop Frederick of Tyre, set sail for Egypt, and so the city was invested totally by sea as well as by land. It was during this painful siege that Saladin first came into contact and forged deep friendships with those who supported the Sunni cause in Egypt. 'I shall never have another friend like him', said Saladin of Ibn Masal, and it was during this period that their friendship was born.[37] Ibn Masal had been quick to throw in his lot with Shirkuh and his loyalty would shortly be severely tested. It was also during this period that the Alexandrians got to know Saladin, and they approved of what they saw. In the years to come, while Saladin ruled Egypt, the loyalty he received from Alexandria never wavered – a loyalty forged during a siege.

By July 1167 it was clear that the city could endure no further; food had run out and Shirkuh's efforts to create diversion had yielded no results. A messenger now secretly slipped out of the city carrying an appeal from Saladin to Shirkuh: you need to resolve this matter quickly, for we cannot endure much longer. Frustrated but unable to reprieve the siege, Shirkuh had no choice but to enter into negotiations with Shawar, who himself was not unwilling to listen, for he was eager that both the Syrian and the Frankish armies depart Egypt. If the Syrians were destroyed then that would leave the Franks in too strong a position, and that would mean solving one problem by creating a larger one. So at the beginning of August terms were agreed and finally the city opened its gates. Saladin was escorted out and lodged with great honour in Amalric's camp, where he received a stream of visitors, among whom many were Franks, eager to meet this young man who had resisted for so long. A Christian chronicle even records that while at the camp Saladin befriended Humphrey of Toron, who spoke Arabic fluently, and who, out of respect for his bravery, knighted Saladin. An apocryphal story of course, but even in those early years are the beginnings of a Western fascination with Saladin, which would slowly give birth to the legend.

Led by drums and trumpets, Shawar made a triumphant entry into Alexandria. In a tent he now sat, with Amalric by his side, as the leading dignitaries of the city entered. Refusing to greet them, he did not allow

them to sit until he was reprimanded by Amalric: 'Greet your holy men with honour', he urged him. Shawar then reproached them with fury at their disobedience and flagrant rebellion, at which point the sources say that a scholar of the period replied, 'We will fight whoever comes under the cross, no matter who he is'. Despite the terms of the truce, which had proclaimed an amnesty, revenge was in Shawar's heart and he ordered the arrest of the leading conspirators. In this way Ibn al-Zubayr was brought to him and was put to death. As for Ibn Masal, he went into hiding and managed to slip away and flee to Syria and into Nur al-Din's service. In Amalric's camp, news reached Saladin of Shawar's actions and he at once appealed to the king to intervene. Noble of spirit, Amalric intervened and reproached Shawar. He also agreed to Saladin's request that ships be provided to transport the sick and wounded to Syria, for nothing could be gained from further fighting. In this way, by September, Saladin was back in Damascus.

From historical obscurity Saladin had emerged; at Babain he had been set a military task and had accomplished it proficiently, and in Alexandria his resolve was put to the test and he had risen to the challenge. Perhaps he recalled the siege that he had endured as a child in Baalbek and how his father had retained the loyalty of the city through diplomacy – if so, it had been a valuable lesson. In a few brief months Saladin had achieved more than any of his Syrian contemporaries. He had come of age and his qualifications for command could not be questioned.[38] But if Saladin could be reasonably satisfied with his achievements in Egypt, Shirkuh was gripped by a fury that raged inside him. For the second time he had failed to tame Egypt; put simply, the alliance between Shawar and Amalric was too strong to break. Nur al-Din was diplomatic and seemingly resigned: 'You have exerted yourself twice', he informed Shirkuh, 'but have not achieved what you sought', and to ease his failure he put him in charge of Homs. As for Saladin, he slowly recovered from his hardship, but on one issue he was resolved – he would never return to Egypt. Never had the lands of Syria seem more welcoming and when, as recognition of his achievements, Nur al-Din granted him two estates around Aleppo, he truly felt he had everything he could wish for.

Chapter 5

The Unlikely Vizier

As long as Egypt remains Muslim, I am ready to become the price of the Muslims.

The Fatimid caliph Al-Adid

Amalric could not fail to notice how weak Egypt was and how easily it would fall to his army. On him pressure was now put by his knights – in particular the Hospitallers – who had bankrupted themselves in campaigns in Egypt and had reaped no reward. At the very least, they urged, let us seize the city of Bilbais as a return on our investment. And so an invasion of Egypt was orchestrated and it was agreed that when the caliph's treasure was taken, Amalric would have half as booty and that the rest would be shared according to the rules of military justice. When news reached Amalric that Nur al-Din was distracted by events in Mosul, he understood that the time was opportune and, in October 1168, he advanced on Egypt. Shawar, in alarm, tried to buy him off, but to no avail, for it was his actions initially in inviting him into Egypt that had led to these events. What occurred now sent shock-waves throughout the land. Bilbais fell quickly and the Franks plundered the city without mercy; houses were burned down and both Christian Copts and Muslims slain. But the events at Bilbais would have severe repercussions for Amalric, for what was intended to be an ordered conquest of Egypt had rapidly degenerated into a blood-bath. The message sent to the population of Egypt was a chilling one, as the Egyptians watched

in horror the advance of the Latin army. Amalric then turned towards Cairo, approaching it via the old city of Fustat. By now Shawar was desperate: he did not possess the forces to resist, and Amalric was not interested in listening to offers. Fustat possessed no city walls and could not be defended, so in November Shawar decided to prevent the supplies of the city falling into the hands of the Franks by setting it on fire. Over 10,000 torches were used and for two days the city burned as its inhabitants fled in terror: 'as though', in the words of a contemporary writer, 'leaving their graves for the Resurrection'. Skirting Fustat, Amalric then attacked Cairo with such force that the city nearly fell.

Such news, of course, could not fail to reach Nur al-Din and, to his surprise, he received a personal appeal from none other than the Fatimid caliph, al-Adid, a wistful young man of less than 20 years. In his own handwriting he appealed that Egypt should not fall to Amalric, for the consequences would be disastrous. He stressed how Muslim solidarity needed to transcend sectarian differences and, in the letter, he included a lock of his wife's hair, as a sign of his desperation. When Shawar heard of the letter he confronted al-Adid, claiming that the young caliph was deluding himself, for he was the one most likely to suffer from Nur al-Din's intervention. But the palace was no longer listening to the vizier, for the catastrophic results of Shawar's policy were all too apparent:[1] Bilbais had been devastated, Fustat destroyed, Cairo besieged and Egypt was on the verge of a Christian occupation. 'As long as Egypt remains Muslim, I am ready to become the price of the Muslims' was al-Adid's response to Shawar. What was clear, as Ehrenkreutz noted, was that the Fatimid palace establishment had become utterly disappointed with the appalling performance of its vizier.[2]

Whether the letter influenced Nur al-Din is unlikely, for he did not require an appeal from an Ismaili to understand the danger that a Frankish conquest of Egypt would pose. With remarkable speed he gathered his army: he gave Shirkuh 200,000 dinars and allowed him to handpick 2,000 soldiers from the regiments, and offered an extra 20 dinars per regiment to cover the costs of the campaign.[3] Shirkuh used the money rapidly to hire 6,000 Turkish cavalrymen from the Yaruquis tribe. Within one month Shirkuh was ready to depart for Egypt. There was one problem, however – Saladin refused to go. He had vowed not to return to Egypt and he simply did not wish to endure another campaign. The situation was delicate, since Shirkuh insisted that Saladin accompany him and Nur al-Din could not

simply command him. Persuasion was necessary. Saladin, as a last excuse, claimed he had no money and so Nur al-Din at once offered him horses and money. But still Saladin refused, until finally pressure from the one person he could not say no to – his father – persuaded him that he owed a duty to Nur al-Din which he had to fulfil. 'I went to Egypt as if I was going to my grave', Saladin later recalled to Ibn Shaddad. Indeed, when the initial request had come from Shirkuh, Saladin had retorted 'If the Kingdom of Egypt were offered to me, I would not go'. In fact he would go, and the Kingdom of Egypt would be offered to him. Nevertheless, Saladin's reluctance is hard to explain. Clearly his refusal to go could not have been down to a lack of courage, for he had more than adequately proven himself in the previous campaign. The only hint we get – and it is only a hint, which can never be definitely resolved – is that a certain tension existed between him and his uncle. Perhaps he had not been impressed by the way Shirkuh had commanded the army during the second campaign, or maybe he resented having been left to hold Alexandria. No matter, while Fustat burned and Cairo defended itself desperately, reluctance had to be overcome. There was no time to lose.

A formidable Syrian army now approached Egypt. Shawar, ever the politician, sent a message offering to join forces to defeat Amalric, but Shirkuh ignored the message: 'We have other plans', he retorted, for this time he was determined he would not return empty-handed. Equally alarmed was Amalric. He had not expected Nur al-Din to move so quickly, and he had no desire to meet Shirkuh in battle. So, retreating to Bilbais, he collected his forces, and on 2 January 1169 he returned to Jerusalem. The road to Cairo lay open and events moved with bewildering pace; Shirkuh entered Cairo with his army shortly after, and on 10 January he met with the Fatimid caliph al-Adid, who bestowed on him a robe of honour which Shirkuh showed his troops. Rumours were rife; there were reports that Shawar was contemplating the assassination of Shirkuh but was dissuaded from doing so by his son al-Kamil.[4] One week later Shawar himself was dead.

The brutal truth, probably agreed during the meeting between Shirkuh and al-Adid, was that Shawar had to die. The actual events that led to his murder appear simple. Lured into the Syrian camp on the pretext of paying a visit to the supposedly ill Shirkuh, Shawar was, upon his arrival, overpowered and slain by two of Nur al-Din's men, Jurdik and Bargash. There

is no mention of Saladin. This version of events contrasts sharply with that of Ibn al-Athir, who claims that the plot against Shawar was hatched by Saladin and Jurdik without the consent of Shirkuh. Although Ibn al-Athir's hostility towards Saladin is well known, the same story is confirmed by Saladin's biographer Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who goes even further in claiming that Shirkuh not only disapproved of Saladin's plan, but even despatched Isa al-Hakkari to warn Shawar, a warning that was ignored. Did Saladin play a role in Shawar's murder? There can be no conclusive evidence either way, but if he did then it was a role which, far from being covered up, was lauded by the historians. Ibn Shaddad – who could so easily have written Saladin out of the murder of Shawar if he had wished – instead praised Saladin's role in the arrest of Shawar, writing that when the conspirators approached Shawar, only Saladin was brave enough to seize him. The fact was that everyone wanted Shawar dead. Shirkuh wanted to clear the way for himself, and the Fatimid caliph al-Adid understood that by Fatimid political standards ascendancy to the post of vizier by overthrowing and killing the former vizier was an accepted practice.[5] What exact roles Shirkuh and Saladin played in the murder is not clear, but ultimately it mattered little. After all, it is difficult to see how Shawar could have survived Shirkuh's entry into Cairo.

As expected, the vizierate was now offered by al-Adid to Shirkuh and he accepted the position. Shirkuh's appointment appears paradoxical, for it effectively meant that he was serving a caliph who was, in his eyes, a heretic. However, his decision to accept the position of vizier was driven less by ideology and more by political expediency. Egypt required a vizier to administer it and he was unwilling to allow anyone else to assume the position. What Nur al-Din made of Shirkuh's decision was less clear; delight that Egypt was finally conquered must have been tempered with anxiety that Shirkuh had not consulted him. Although Shirkuh was strictly speaking acting as Nur al-Din's representative, it is wrong to overemphasise his subordinate position. In practical terms, when he left Syria, he and his force can better be seen as 'independent adventurers looking for a fortune, than as a detachment of the Syrian army on a foreign campaign'.[6] Rumours spread that Nur al-Din was unhappy by Shirkuh's assumption of the vizierate, but then rumours always surround the actions of great men. Certainly Nur al-Din would have preferred it if Shawar's life had been spared and he had remained as a figurehead, but then again Shawar's duplicity was well known.

Shirkuh he knew well, and he trusted him; after all, he had served him and his father for over 30 years now. A great victory had been achieved and Nur al-Din now ordered that the news be proclaimed throughout Syria and that the towns be decorated accordingly. Egypt was finally his.

The death of Shirkuh and the appointment of Saladin as vizier

Then suddenly, in March 1169, in his third month of office, Shirkuh died. Sudden deaths, particularly among viziers, always arouse suspicions, and rumours of poisoning spread, but it does appear that his death was natural. That he was a formidable character cannot be denied; he made his entrance in history by slaying a man in Tikrit and he left it having achieved what many had only dreamt about. It was he, more than any of Nur al-Din's amirs and perhaps including Nur al-Din himself, who insisted on the importance of Egypt. In the face of adversity he persevered in that dogged, snarling manner which befitted his character. Above all, he was a military man and in so many ways unlike his brother and his nephew, lacking above all their diplomacy. But he championed the Sunni cause as much as they did. Of all the ecumenical theologians and thinkers it was Shirkuh who was the first of those among Nur al-Din who constructed a madrasa that taught both Hanafi and Shafiite law, and though that may have been because he cared little about the details of law, it is to his credit. Perhaps more importantly for him was the fact the madrasa overlooked the polo grounds and one imagines that it was there, in the open air and on horseback rather than in the madrasa, that he most found solace and comfort. We are left with an image of him after he became vizier bogged down in the paperwork that was a necessary part of the position. What is striking was that he remained on his horse while he signed the documents, while grumbling to himself that he had been reduced to the position of a scribe. He was a man of tremendous courage, as witnessed by one example when his army was returning to Syria from Egypt at the end of his first campaign. In the presence of the Franks he remained behind and was the last of his company to leave, and when asked by one of the Franks if he was not afraid of treachery, since he was now defenceless and could easily be captured, Shirkuh snorted and answered that if anything should happen to him his whole army would avenge him.[7] Tempestuous and violent he may have been, but there was no

doubting that he was a soldier of genius, and few generals have been so devotedly loved by their men.[8]

And suddenly, from nowhere, Saladin emerged from the shadows and became vizier. To the observer he is little more than a silhouette,[9] and we have neither a description of him during this period nor even of the men who surrounded him. If up until now we have not spoken much about Saladin it was because there was little to say. And yet he emerged from nowhere to become vizier, even though we do not even know how or why. Ibn al-Athir records that the Fatimid caliph picked Saladin in the hope of bringing him under the palace establishment[10] and of splitting the Syrian ranks: 'There was no one weaker or younger than Yusuf [Saladin]'. But Ibn al-Athir's concern was always to darken Saladin's name in favour of his Zengid masters, and so one reads him with a certain weary wariness. The fact was the Fatimid caliph had very little choice in the matter; the Syrian army had not fought its way to secure Egypt only to have terms dictated to it. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani refers to this when he writes that the Syrian amirs decided on Saladin and 'made the Lord of the Palace invest him as vizier', but he also admits 'opinions differed' during a three-day mourning period for Shirkuh. It is an enigmatic phrase, and we are no closer to answering the question – why Saladin?

The problem is that historians, so as not to make Saladin appear ambitious, played up his early reluctance to return to Egypt. But a reluctant person does not a vizier make. Had he not been ambitious he would not have won Shirkuh's respect, nor would Shirkuh have promoted Saladin to be the commander-in-chief of the Syrian expeditionary army when he was appointed as vizier. In addition, Saladin was under no pressure to accept this position. In the words of Ehrenkreutz, he was not bound to assume his uncle's political and military legacy in Egypt.[11] The amirs – Turks and Kurds – who now surrounded him were fierce, independent men; despatched by Nur al-Din, they served Shirkuh but were under no obligations to serve anyone else. Shirkuh had also left behind 500 of his own mamluks, the Asadiyya, all of whom were battle-hardened veterans, and although the mamluk system implied servitude it did not entail servility.[12] Their master dead, they now looked after their own interests. Nevertheless it does seem that they supported Saladin. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani described those amirs as 'rough companions', driven by self-interest and respecting strength. There is a striking image of Saladin holding a wolf by the ear[13] – clearly, this was not

the place for a reluctant hero. Self-interest, however, needed to be tempered by the knowledge that a great victory had been won. The land of Egypt was theirs and the spoils and profits of war were there for the taking. In addition, the death of Shirkuh had put the amirs in an awkward position, since they were stationed in a foreign country with no political or military status. The Syrians were well aware that they were not welcome in Egypt; Imad al-Din al-Isfahani wrote that they 'have come amongst a people whom they do not know . . . and they see faces that frown at them'. Saladin was the nearest relative to Shirkuh in Egypt, and though that may not have counted for much, the fact that Shirkuh clearly relied on him – indeed had insisted that he accompany him on his campaigns – did. And Saladin had shown daring during the battle of Babain and fortitude during the siege of Alexandria – and these qualities would have been noted. Interestingly his initial reluctance to return to Egypt is passed over in silence. The amirs knew his father, Ayyub, and the respect that Nur al-Din showed him – he was the only one allowed to sit in his presence – would have impressed them. Clearly therefore he came of good stock and possessed qualities that had been tested in the heat of battle. Admittedly Saladin at 30 was very young to be vizier, but it must not be forgotten that Nur al-Din himself had been 29 when he had assumed control of Aleppo, and Amalric had been 31 when he had been crowned as king of Jerusalem.

Initially it appears the vizierate was offered to Shihab al-Din al-Harimi, who was Saladin's maternal uncle, almost certainly because he was the elder of the amirs. Invited to the Fatimid palace to meet with the caliph al-Adid, Shihab al-Din turned down the nomination and instead put forward Saladin's name, and al-Adid appears to have accepted his nomination. There were other candidates: from the Nuriyah camp there was the Turkish amir Ain al-Daula al-Yaruqi, as well as two Kurds, Saif al-Din al-Mashtub and Qutb al-Din Khusrau. That Saladin would emerge as the unanimous choice was largely due to the political manoeuvring of two men: the fellow Kurd Isa al-Hakkari, and Baha ul-Din Qaraqush, a eunuch mamluk manumitted by Shirkuh. Without doubt the more interesting personality was Isa al-Hakkari. A Shafiite Sunni and Kurd, like Saladin, he studied law in northern Iraq and in Aleppo. He then joined the services of Shirkuh, who made him an amir, and he became Shirkuh's personal imam, leading him in prayer and accompanying him to Egypt. Saladin greatly respected him and it was said that al-Hakkari spoke openly in front of him, telling him things others would not

dare. It seems that everywhere al-Hakkari sought the company of religious men; he even taught hadith himself, and it was said that he wore the turban of a scholar while dressed in the uniform of a soldier. It was al-Hakkari who convinced Qarqush, the head of the 3,000 Syrian cavalry force, to support Saladin, and then used the rivalry between the Turks and the Kurds to Saladin's advantage when he convinced Qutb al-Din Khusrau – a fellow Kurd – that if he pursued his claim then it could well mean that a Turk (rather than a Kurd) could assume to the position. Clearly not just a scholar and a soldier but also a diplomat, Saladin owed a considerable debt to al-Hakkari, who was killed during the siege of Acre in 1189. Unfortunately we know little more about this most intriguing of personalities. Qaraqush, on the other hand, could not have been more different. One of Saladin's closest advisers, he was commissioned by him to build the citadel in Cairo as well as the bridge of Giza, and to extend the city walls. Apparently he was not a learned man; appointed as controller of the Fatimid palace by Saladin, he stripped the priceless library in the palace and piled the books on the ground to be sold to the first bidder. 'A Turk who knew nothing about books', was how Imad al-Din al-Isfahani described him. Perhaps, but he was also one of Saladin's most loyal lieutenants – and one of his bravest. When he was captured by the Franks in Acre in 1191, where he had been sent to fortify the city, Saladin paid a ransom of 20,000 dinars to rescue him. He was also a man who made enemies, one of whom, Ibn Mammati, wrote a pamphlet called *Kitab al-fashush fi ahkam Qaraqush* (The Book of Stupidity of the Judgements of Qaraqush).

As Saladin's uncle, Shihab al-Din clearly was not going to stand in his nephew's path, but what of the other three? Ibn al-Athir was quick to record that 'not one of the amirs who sought the position for themselves obeyed him or served him', and notes Ain al-Daula's words when thwarted by Saladin: 'I shall never serve Yusuf'. But they would serve him again. Ain al-Daula returned to Syria, where he received a frosty reception from Nur al-Din, who rebuked him for abandoning Saladin. Qutb al-Din Khusrau also headed back to Syria, but a few months later he returned to Egypt to help Saladin when the Franks attacked Damietta. As for the third contender to the vizierate, al-Mashtub, his ambitions too may have been thwarted, but there is one incident, many years later, which summed up his relationship with Saladin. It occurred at the height of the Third Crusade when the Muslim forces were unable to stop the advances of Richard's army and

when, to all, it seemed that Jerusalem was to fall to the Franks. Out of desperation, Saladin ordered that all the cisterns around the city be destroyed so that the Franks would have no drinking water. He then called a council of war to be attended by the leading amirs during which, Saladin spoke: the Muslims were depending on them, he said, and the time had come to fight. The gravity of the situation was not lost on all those present and for a long time no words were spoken. Finally it was al-Mashtub who broke the silence, declaring that he would support Saladin to the death.

The rise of al-Qadi al-Fadil

Another reason, less commented upon, for Saladin's rise to power was the support he received from the Sunnis of Egypt and particularly from those in the Fatimid administration, who sided with him against the dynasty they were meant to be serving. In that regard there could not have been a more important person than al-Qadi al-Fadil. Recognised today as one of Saladin's advisers, he was much more than that – a fact acknowledged by Saladin, who claimed that the lands of Egypt were not conquered by his armies but by the pen of al-Qadi al-Fadil. No one had more influence on Saladin than him, and no one articulated his vision as clearly. Indeed, one often wonders whose vision al-Qadi al-Fadil was articulating – a fact hinted at by him when he wrote, 'Other men send their messages to the sultan, but the sultan is my messenger in the letters I send'. Everywhere we look we find al-Qadi al-Fadil. In his biographical sketch, Brockelmann writes that al-Qadi al-Fadil was Saladin's right-hand man in carrying out the reforms necessary in the army and taxation;[14] in his *Khitat*, al-Maqrizi writes that he played a major role in the overthrow of the Fatimids; while Imad al-Din al-Isfahani stressed the crucial role al-Qadi al-Fadil played during the Third Crusade. Writing a century after al-Qadi al-Fadil's death, Ibn Fadlallah al-Umari recorded that:

> *Al-Qadi Fadil was the Salahian state. He was its secretary, its vizier, its master, its advisor and the supplier of its army. He carried all its burdens, ruled over all its regions . . . Whenever the Sultan was away he ruled on his behalf, or helped his deputies . . . He was invested with full authority in the state of Salah ud-Din and was the one who decided on the fate of people and on matters of life and death.*[15]

What is clear is that al-Qadi al-Fadil was not simply a passive scribe or administrator carrying out Saladin's orders. Far from it – he played an active and vibrant role in the political events of the day. Possessed with a sharp intelligence and famed for his knowledge, he shared the same religious ideals and vision as Saladin. In fact one could argue that al-Qadi al-Fadil articulated this vision – therein lay his talent – in a way in which Saladin was incapable of. Saladin was aware of this and he delegated to him enormous power in Egypt[16] – for 22 consecutive years al-Qadi al-Fadil held powers second only to those of Saladin.

Abd al-Latif Baghdadi has left us an eyewitness description of al-Qadi al-Fadil. Visiting him in his tent during the siege of Acre, he was clearly impressed by the man's distinctive presence:

> *We came into the presence of al-Qadi al-Fadil and saw a frail old man, all head and heart. He was writing and dictating to two people, with all kinds of movements of the face and the lips caused by his eagerness to get his words out. It was as though he was writing with his whole body.*[17]

In fact the frail old man described by Baghdadi was seven years older than his friend, Saladin.

Abd al-Rahim Ibn Ali al-Baysani, known as al-Qadi al-Fadil, was born in Ascalon, where he received his basic education. He grew up in a town that was almost permanently under siege from the Franks, who surrounded it with a ring of castles. Ascalon would fall to them in 1153. As was the nature of things at that time, he travelled to Fatimid Cairo to begin his career as a scribe in the Diwan al-Insha (Palace of Epistles), where he was introduced to the art of epistolary and secretarial writing. As a young cleric he devoted considerable time to enriching his vocabulary and improving his grammar, as well as learning the basis of balagha (rhetoric).[18] He would also have studied tafsir (Quranic commentary), hadith, calligraphy, as well as accounting. It is important to note that al-Qadi al-Fadil was not a product of the madrasa system and did not receive a systematic legal education. The reason for this was simple enough – there were no Sunni madrasas in Fatimid Cairo. Interestingly, however, he did spend a few years in Alexandria, where he worked as a scribe and where he was immersed in the Sunni atmosphere of this fervent city-port, which would certainly have reminded him of Ascalon. While in Alexandria he studied under al-Silafi and Ibn Awf. It is unlikely, though, that he attended a law college in any systematic manner.

After completing his education in the Diwan al-Insha, al-Qadi al-Fadil was employed as a junior secretary, where the hours were long and the pay poor, a fact which he bemoaned:

> *The inefficient have neither been harmed for their incompetence.*
> *Nor have I benefited from my proficiency.*
> *The more efficiency I demonstrate,*
> *The more my livelihood is reduced.*[19]

Ambitious for promotion, al-Qadi al-Fadil continued to push his way up in the diwan, imposing himself and his talents on his superiors until he got the recognition that he sought. He served for a period in the Diwan al-Jaysh (army), where he became familiar with military matters. He was also appointed as private secretary to al-Kamil, the son of Shawar. We cannot pass over al-Qadi al-Fadil's career without noting that he appeared to have assumed the political stance of whoever he served under. To a large extent this was natural as the career and, on occasion, the life of a scribe and secretary depended on pleasing his patron, who offered him advancement and security. This Machiavellian sagacity[20] was best reflected in his poetry, where he eulogised events which he clearly would have disagreed with. Such was the life of a scribe. In fact, as a Shafiite Sunni, al-Qadi al-Fadil would have had little religious sympathy for the Fatimid regime. Trained in the chancery, he would have been well versed in the intricacies of Ismaili doctrine, since the composition of any letters required the appropriate phraseology to be employed, but a familiarity with a doctrine does not reflect convictions.[21]

How al-Qadi al-Fadil came to run the chancery for Shirkuh and Saladin is not clear, but the transition from serving the Fatimids – where he undeniably had an important position – to serving Shirkuh appears to have been seamless. Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that Shirkuh appointed someone in such an important position whose Sunni credentials were not of the highest order. We do not know what behind-the-scenes contact there was between the two men, but that there was a shared ideology of restoring an orthodox Sunnism there can be no doubt. Al-Qadi al-Fadil was an 'insider' who understood the workings of government, and during the final death pangs of the Fatimid state the alienated Sunnis in the civil administration began to usurp power for themselves. In fact he was instrumental in surrendering the Fatimid state into the hands of Shirkuh and Saladin. As Lev

has demonstrated, there can be no better example of that than the letters of appointment proclaiming Shirkuh and (then later) Saladin as Fatimid viziers, which al-Qadi al-Fadil drafted.[22]

The opening paragraphs of Shirkuh's letter of appointment is in line with Fatimid traditional phraseology, demonstrating, if nothing else, that al-Qadi al-Fadil was familiar with its usage. A tired charade – *pour la forme* – had to be reiterated, which requested Shirkuh acknowledge the primacy of al-Adid as the rightly guided imam and Commander of the Faithful, and to act, in his capacity as vizier, within the framework of the Ismaili state. This of course was absurd; Shirkuh had not been despatched by Nur al-Din to serve the Fatimid caliphate but to terminate it, and one wonders what the gnarled one-eyed Shirkuh would have made of this. But though the caliph had no clothes, the figleaf – in phraseology at least – had to be preserved. Epistolary camouflage, however, could not conceal that the edifice had crumbled and that the guards had left their post. Yet careful reading of the letter, comparing it with Shawar's letter of appointment, reveals a noticeable shift of emphasis. In Shawar's letter it was made clear that the vizier was a subordinate of the imams and the divine legitimisation of Fatimid rule is central to the text. In Shirkuh's letter, however, although the role of the imam is acknowledged, most of the text is devoted to the vizier and his responsibilities.[23]

Within three months Shirkuh was dead and Saladin had assumed the vizierate. Once again al-Qadi al-Fadil drafted the letter of appointment. On the surface it seemed that nothing had changed in such a short period of time, but behind the scenes a dramatic shift had taken place. Having stressed the essential points of the Fatimid credo, al-Qadi al-Fadil inserted a remarkable declaration that Saladin's vizierate was hereditary. In true chancery manner he created a smoke screen to conceal this dramatic development by invoking the hereditary vizierate of Badr al-Jamali as a historical precedent, but no one was fooled. Badr's son al-Afdal had been forced unto the Fatimid caliph, while Saladin's letter of appointment gave him a priori legitimacy.[24] The fact was the Fatimid ruling establishment had lost control over the chancery. Perhaps al-Qadi al-Fadil was being cautious in Shirkuh's letter of appointment and only tweaked some changes, but within the three months that saw Saladin's appointment he become emboldened by the realisation that the tide had definitely turned in Sunni favour. It is certain that he would not have drafted the letter without first discussing it in detail with Saladin. Lev's conclusion is damning: 'In plain terms, the Fatimid regime

was betrayed by the administrators in its service'.[25] Al-Qadi al-Fadil of course would not have seen this as a betrayal but as his duty as a Sunni to restore orthodox rule in Egypt. Although the co-operation of the civilian elite with the newly arrived Sunni forces was not limited to him, there is no question that he was instrumental in this 'betrayal'. Saladin was a stranger in Egypt and although Nur al-Din and Shirkuh had, over the years, made contact with Sunni elements in Alexandria and Fustat, they urgently needed people within the administrative system who understood the running of the land. One can view the shift into Saladin's service as acts of self-preservation by members of the chancery and administrators, who were constantly looking for patrons, but that would not be telling the full story, for there is no doubt that the co-operation of the civil elite of the Fatimid state with Saladin was religiously motivated. The common bond of Sunni Islam was overpowering. If the motives had been purely self-preservation and advancement, then one would have expected to see individuals hedging their bets, since the co-operation between the Sunni elements and Nur al-Din and Shirkuh had begun as early as the campaign of 1167 when victory was by no means certain.

On the 26 March 1169, Saladin was invested as vizier of the Fatimid state. The investiture took place at the magnificent palace of the vizier. He now received sumptuous garments, his sword of office, and several precious gifts from the caliph.[26] He was then addressed by the new honorific name of al-Malik al-Nasir. It is a common assumption to believe that Saladin, as the last Fatimid vizier, was the architect behind the demise of the Fatimid caliphate. In reality he was simply the person who administered the last rites.

Chapter 6

Master of Egypt

Had he known that you would not drop his name from the khutba, he would not have died.

Al-Qadi al-Fadil

On the 26 March 1169 Saladin was invested as vizier of the Fatimid state, a state which he had been sent to destroy. This fundamental and striking paradox lay at the heart of his vizierate, and how he dealt with it revealed a considerable amount about his character and would affect his actions in later life. There is no doubt that his awareness of the importance of Egypt, the threat of the Franks and the dangers to Islam of disunity grew from his early experiences as the lieutenant of his uncle Shirkuh in the three Egyptian campaigns.[1] It was in these early years that he laid the foundation of his later military and political career.[2] Up until now he had existed in the shadows, playing a supporting role to the main characters of Nur al-Din, Shirkuh, Amalric and Shawar, but now all eyes were on him and finally he stepped into the light. He was a stranger in a strange and dangerous land, and youthful exuberance needed to be tempered by that knowledge. Admittedly he was now the vizier, but this was a position which did not promise a long life. The fate of Nasr, the son of a previous vizier, who had slain a caliph (supposedly his lover) in an attempt to seize power would have been well known to him, and it did not augur well. After failing in an escape

attempt, Nasr was personally mutilated and hung, and his rotting body was left to swing for two years at the Gate of Zuwaila.

If there was little of the theoretician in Saladin's character, there was a considerable amount of statesmanship. Averse to taking risks, there was little impetuousness in his manner; instead at a relatively young age he displayed the maturity of a practical politician. Indeed, he went to great lengths to prepare the political and diplomatic ground before taking action.[3] Baha ul-Din Ibn Shaddad noted that Saladin 'would ponder and deliberate, exposing each aspect of the situation and taking the necessary steps to deal with it, without becoming angry, for he was never irate'. Such was his nature that Saladin, throughout his life, found taking decisions a painful process. Ibn Shaddad recalled a later incident which captured this aspect of his character:

> *That night I was on duty beside him from sunset until it was almost dawn. It was winter and we were alone but for God. We discussed this project and that, examining the implication of each in turn, until I began to feel concerned for him and to fear for his health, for he seemed to be overwhelmed by despair.*

As for Abu Shama, he recorded that Saladin was apprehensive about dealing with matters alone and used to correspond regularly with al-Qadi al-Fadil, informing him about the latest events and seeking his advice on important issues. Saladin's lack of impetuousness was complemented by a self-control which Arabs believed was the sign of good breeding. Ibn Shaddad describes how:

> *I was there when news came to him of the death of his little son Ismail. He read the letter, and spoke to no one; we had to learn about it from others. He betrayed no reaction except that as he read the letter his eyes filled with tears.*

If self-control was considered one of the noblest virtues among the Muslims of the period, then generosity was at the very least its match. Al-Qadi al-Fadil wrote that debt was the disease of the generous, and defended the extravagances of Saladin's brother Turan Shah – it was said that he had personally spent as much as 200,000 dinars – by writing to Saladin that the 'master should not hold him to account for what he gives away, for when

the master gives him gifts, he makes him an intermediary between himself and those who ask'.[4] Saladin himself was known for his generosity and Ibn Shaddad noted that his treasurers kept certain reserves concealed from him for fear that some financial emergency might arise, for they knew that the moment he heard about them he would spend them.

The crushing of the Sudanese uprising and the dismantlement of the Fatimid state

The fact was that at the moment of his greatest triumph Saladin found himself at his weakest position. Alexandria he knew well, of course, but he was not there now and Cairo was a strange and alien place. Many of Nur al-Din's amirs had left to return to Syria and had taken their men with them. All who remained were Shirkuh's men – the Asadiyya – and about 500 mamluks and 3,000 cavalry commanded by Qaraqush. Saladin could rely on the Asadiyya contingent, but as for the loyalty of the Nuriyah he was less sure. Of one thing he could be certain and that was he could not be certain of the Fatimid army, composed largely of Sudanese infantry and Armenian cavalry. He needed rapidly to bring in his own men. Around him was his askar, cavalrymen who formed his personal and permament guard and who were composed of both free men and mamluks. By the summer of 1169 Saladin had already formed a personal regiment – the Salahiya – which was commanded by Abul Huija the Gross, one of his most loyal lieutenants. To reward his men and retain their loyalty he needed to grant them land assingments, and as he began to phase out the old Egyptian army by withdrawing from the Fatimid commanders the lands which had been granted to them, he would have known that he had set himself on a path of confrontation. To regularise this matter he needed support in the bureaucracy, and here he was greatly aided by al-Qadi al-Fadil, who made the Diwan al-Iqta (where land-grants were assigned) independent from the Diwan al-Jaysh (army) and placed it under the directorship of his friend al-As'ad ibn Mammati, a Copt who had converted to Islam. Saladin understood the nature of the risk, but unless he broke the Fatimid army and replaced it with his own men then his survival, let alone his success, would remain precarious.

Initially reluctant to embark on the campaign, Saladin now found himself in a position where he had few friends and many enemies and in a city which he did not know but dared not leave for fear of rebellion. He was by

nature cautious – he had far more of his father in him than his uncle – but then he had a lot to be cautious about, for within the first six months of his vizierate he faced an internal plot, an army rebellion and a foreign invasion. But Saladin was also aware that he ruled over a wealthy land, wealthy beyond the imagination of men. This was the land of pharaohs and ptolemies, where Alexander had marched his army across a desert in search of an oracle and Caesar had wooed an Egyptian queen. If Saladin had not known it before, he now understood that he effectively ruled over a land far wealthier than the Syria which he so loved. But he was largely alone, and with Shirkuh gone Saladin needed people he could trust. He wrote to Nur al-Din and requested that his elder brother Turan Shah be sent to him. Nur al-Din dispatched Turan Shah to Egypt, though not without first advising him to treat Saladin not as his younger brother but as the master of Egypt. The accounts that play up Nur al-Din's anger at Saladin need to be qualified by the realisation that he did do what Saladin asked. He must have known that agreeing to send family members to Egypt would only strengthen Saladin's position, but he sent them with his blessing. In any case Nur al-Din had much bigger problems to deal with than Egypt. A massive earthquake struck northern Syria, which destroyed half of Aleppo and caused damage in Homs, Hama and Baalbek. At once Nur al-Din turned his attention northwards. A couple of months later, in September 1170, his brother died in Mosul, leaving behind a succession struggle which occupied him until May 1171, when he returned to Damascus.

Aware of the dangers that surrounded him, Saladin was unprepared to rush things, and for the first few months of his vizierate he refused to leave Cairo. If he did not know Egypt and distrusted its people, then the Egyptians did not know him and were indifferent to his fate; after all he was the fifth vizier in six years. To them he appeared young and soft spoken, possessing none of the cunning of Shawar or the brute force of Shirkuh. As Saladin viewed his position, he knew that he had to act slowly and with cunning to chip away at the base of the column of Fatimid power,[5] for there was still life in the sick man of the Nile. And even if the sick man died, the ghost still needed to be excorcised. In fact it would take Saladin two and a half years to achieve his goal, which was the dismemberment of the Fatimid dynasty and its replacement with a Sunni one. From the start, he befriended al-Adid, the young Fatimid caliph whose appeals to Nur al-Din had prevented Egypt falling to Amalric, and both men appeared together during

the ceremonies associated with the month of Ramadan. These even included a visit to al-Azhar, which was of course the main centre for Ismaili propagation. If either man was aware of the anomaly of that position, then it was not mentioned. Interestingly we read that when Saladin visited the caliphal palace, he entered it on horseback, which had previously been the exclusive privilege of the Fatimid imam. However, seemingly friendly relations and diplomatic visits could not disguise the dangers lying in wait in the land of the Nile, and within weeks of assuming the vizierate word reached Saladin that a plot was being hatched against him. This involved a palace eunuch, Mu'tamin al-Khilafa, who was inciting the Sudanese regiments to rebel while sending secret messages to Amalric to invade. We are told that when Amalric heard of Shirkuh's death, he dismounted and prostrated himself on the ground, for he was now certain that Egypt would be his. Mu'tamin believed that once news of Amalric's approach reached Saladin he would have no option but to advance to confront him, at which point the uprising in Cairo would finish him off. As for the Sudanese regiments, they had a reason for grievance for they were angered by Saladin's efforts to phase them out and replace them with his Syrian and Kurdish amirs. They also possessed a fierce reputation and it was said that whenever they rose against a vizier they killed him. Daily they grew more insolent and violent, and an eyewitness account relates that they 'stopped the roads and seized the money of travellers, or shed their blood'. Informed of the plot, Saladin chose to conceal the knowledge and to wait for the opportune moment to strike, for he knew that the first act would unleash a chain of violent and unpredictable events and he needed to prepare with care. In the meantime he waited for his brother, who arrived in July. Turan Shah was more like Shirkuh than Ayyub, and his profligacy was notorious – he would fritter away as much money as Nur al-Din spent on conquering Egypt. On occasion, and especially when drunk, he lashed out against his younger brother, for a certain envy was inevitable, but he could be trusted in the heat of battle – and that is what mattered.

Emboldened by his brother's arrival, Saladin acted and Mu'tamin was arrested, slain and his severed head sent to Saladin. In his place, Saladin appointed Qaraqush. The next day, on 21 August 1169, the Sudanese regiments rose in open and defiant rebellion and took up their position in the great square of Cairo between the west and east palaces. To them now flocked all those who had concealed their enmity to Saladin, both among

the Egyptian amirs and the common folk. Estimates vary, but they would have numbered around 50,000, a far greater number than the Syrians. The rebels clearly knew their city and had chosen their location well, for they forced Saladin to fight on ground not of his own choosing, overlooked on the flanks by buildings held by the palace troops, who might at any moment join in against him.[6] The situation was extremely perilious and the unknown factor was how the Fatimid al-Adid would respond. Would he support his vizier? Saladin was uncertain, and so when his army took their position in the great square he held back some troops in case he was attacked by the caliph's men from the flanks. It was Turan Shah and Abul Huija who took the battle to the Sudanese regiments in the square and for two days a fierce fight ensued. Still Saladin held back, his eyes fixed not on the battle ahead but on the caliphal palace. On the third day a dramatic and disturbing development took place, when a shower of arrows rained down on Saladin's men from the caliph's Armenian archers. A critical point in the battle had approached; if al-Adid took the side of his regiments then Saladin's position would be in great danger. At once Saladin summoned his brother, and the two brothers became locked in urgent discussions. Then dramatically a decision was taken and Saladin ordered that the Armenian archers and the palace from where arrows had been fired should be set on fire with naphtha. On this decision the battle turned; at once the caliph sent out a message to Saladin assuring him that his flanks were safe and urging him to crush the Sudanese regiments. Saladin's nerve had held and he now acted with determination and ruthlessness, throwing the remainder of his troops into battle and driving the Sudanese back from the square down to Bab Zuwaila. He had foreseen this and had prepared the ground – he had ordered that all the side streets be blocked off so there could be no escape. At the Market of the Sword Sellers, just short of Bab Zuwaila, the Sudanese made a valiant stand, but it was futile because they could not withstand the momentum of the Syrian forces. And when news reached them that Saladin had sent men to burn down their quarters in the Mansuriya district, they became certain that Saladin would show them no mercy. In vain they asked for quarter but none was given; it was Turan Shah who pursued them all the way to Giza, where he slaughtered them to the man. Never again would Saladin face a military challenge in Cairo.[7]

No sooner had the Sudanese revolt been crushed than news arrived from Damietta that a joint Frankish–Byzantine force was approaching the city.

The choice of Damietta was deliberate since it could be attacked by land and by sea. A planned attack was co-ordinated which saw Amalric approach by land while the Byzantine Andronicus Contostephanus commanded the fleet. For Amalric the moment to seize Egypt seemed opportune, for Saladin had yet to consolidate his position, and Amalric had discussed the conquest of Egypt with the Byzantine emperor, whose grand-niece he had married in 1167. Once again, however, Saladin's intelligence network worked well, for he knew where the attack would be. He still did not feel secure enough to leave Cairo, as reports of further plots reached him daily, so he dispatched his nephew Taqi ul-Din, together with his maternal uncle Shihab al-Din al-Harimi, to man the defences of Damietta. Help also now flooded in from Nur al-Din, who sent several amirs, including Qutb al-Din Khusrau, who himself had once vied for the vizierate. Even al-Adid, the Fatimid caliph, contributed by dispatching the enormous sum of one million dinars. Whether Ismaili or Sunni, it seemed that the determination was the same: Egypt would not fall to the Franks. That which had been gained would not easily be lost. The unity of the Muslims was not matched by that of the Franks and the Byzantines and tension quickly arose; Andronicus urged a quick assault on Damietta using scaling ladders, but Amalric insisted on a siege tower being built. The crusaders began to build the needed war machines but the people of Damietta were not lacking in cunning; taking advantage of favourable winds, they launched a fire boat into the midst of the fleet and only the vigilance of Amalric prevented the destruction of the entire fleet. Delays in arrival also meant that the Byzantines were already short of money, since the campaign had been estimated to last three months and Amalric's laxity in arriving by land meant that though the fleet had set out in August 1169 the assault on Damietta did not commence until October. A tense situation was exacerbated when the Byzantines asked for loans, a request which the Franks turned down. Unable to obtain provisions, the Greeks were faced with a food shortage and foraged the countryside for dates, raisins and chestnuts. For 50 days a futile siege took place, but the heart had gone out of the besiegers and by December, with winter setting in, the gloomy siege was lifted and the Byzantine–Frankish forces turned back. To symbolise a miserable expedition, winter storms sunk several of the Byzantine ships as they returned home.

The establishment of Saladin's authority in Egypt

The crisis was over. Saladin had faced down an army rebellion, an internal plot and a foreign invasion all within six months of assuming the vizierate, and he had emerged stronger. Throughout, he had been unable to leave Cairo for fear of plots, but the victory at Damietta gave him confidence and he now ordered the execution of several people in the city whom he suspected of treachery. The property and lands that had once belonged to the Sudanese regiments were allocated to Saladin's amirs. This was done for two main reasons: obviously partly as a reward for the service and loyalty shown, but also in an attempt to tie the Syrian amirs to the land and to build a bond between them and Egypt. Saladin had not forgotten how the caliph al-Adid had wavered during the crisis and he now effectively put him under house arrest, and the buildings and commerical properties which once belonged to the Fatimid state were appropriated. The personnel of the Fatimid court, including the slaves, was dispersed by Qaraqush, whom Saladin put as supervisor of the palaces, and many gifts and tributes were either sold on the open market or sent to Nur al-Din. As for Saladin, he chose as his residence the former palace of the Fatimid viziers.

Saladin certainly felt more comfortable now, as Nur al-Din had sent amirs whom he knew well and trusted. He had faced the sternest of challenges but had demonstrated shrewdness and calmness each time; already we can see the qualities which he would carry with him later in life – the careful planning, the cautiousness and the level-headedness. In addition, and to his great joy, his father Ayyub arrived from Syria and around him now gathered his brother Turan Shah and his nephew Taqi ul-Din, as well as two other brothers, al-Adil and Tughtekin.[8] Indeed the only other name that can be recognised as being in the same level of seniority during this period is Qaraqush. In gathering his family around him Saladin was simply conforming to the tradition of collective familial sovereignty which he had inherited from his father, and which Ayyub had taken from Shadi. They in turn viewed him as the rising star, who could lead the family to great things. Exactly one year earlier Saladin had stubbornly refused to return to Egypt, but now finally – despite the distant rumbling of plots and mutinies, which meant that the storm was never over – he could for the first time say he was in control of Egypt. This achievement was symbolised by the birth, in

The choice of Damietta was deliberate since it could be attacked by land and by sea. A planned attack was co-ordinated which saw Amalric approach by land while the Byzantine Andronicus Contostephanus commanded the fleet. For Amalric the moment to seize Egypt seemed opportune, for Saladin had yet to consolidate his position, and Amalric had discussed the conquest of Egypt with the Byzantine emperor, whose grand-niece he had married in 1167. Once again, however, Saladin's intelligence network worked well, for he knew where the attack would be. He still did not feel secure enough to leave Cairo, as reports of further plots reached him daily, so he dispatched his nephew Taqi ul-Din, together with his maternal uncle Shihab al-Din al-Harimi, to man the defences of Damietta. Help also now flooded in from Nur al-Din, who sent several amirs, including Qutb al-Din Khusrau, who himself had once vied for the vizierate. Even al-Adid, the Fatimid caliph, contributed by dispatching the enormous sum of one million dinars. Whether Ismaili or Sunni, it seemed that the determination was the same: Egypt would not fall to the Franks. That which had been gained would not easily be lost. The unity of the Muslims was not matched by that of the Franks and the Byzantines and tension quickly arose; Andronicus urged a quick assault on Damietta using scaling ladders, but Amalric insisted on a siege tower being built. The crusaders began to build the needed war machines but the people of Damietta were not lacking in cunning; taking advantage of favourable winds, they launched a fire boat into the midst of the fleet and only the vigilance of Amalric prevented the destruction of the entire fleet. Delays in arrival also meant that the Byzantines were already short of money, since the campaign had been estimated to last three months and Amalric's laxity in arriving by land meant that though the fleet had set out in August 1169 the assault on Damietta did not commence until October. A tense situation was exacerbated when the Byzantines asked for loans, a request which the Franks turned down. Unable to obtain provisions, the Greeks were faced with a food shortage and foraged the countryside for dates, raisins and chestnuts. For 50 days a futile siege took place, but the heart had gone out of the besiegers and by December, with winter setting in, the gloomy siege was lifted and the Byzantine–Frankish forces turned back. To symbolise a miserable expedition, winter storms sunk several of the Byzantine ships as they returned home.

The establishment of Saladin's authority in Egypt

The crisis was over. Saladin had faced down an army rebellion, an internal plot and a foreign invasion all within six months of assuming the vizierate, and he had emerged stronger. Throughout, he had been unable to leave Cairo for fear of plots, but the victory at Damietta gave him confidence and he now ordered the execution of several people in the city whom he suspected of treachery. The property and lands that had once belonged to the Sudanese regiments were allocated to Saladin's amirs. This was done for two main reasons: obviously partly as a reward for the service and loyalty shown, but also in an attempt to tie the Syrian amirs to the land and to build a bond between them and Egypt. Saladin had not forgotten how the caliph al-Adid had wavered during the crisis and he now effectively put him under house arrest, and the buildings and commerical properties which once belonged to the Fatimid state were appropriated. The personnel of the Fatimid court, including the slaves, was dispersed by Qaraqush, whom Saladin put as supervisor of the palaces, and many gifts and tributes were either sold on the open market or sent to Nur al-Din. As for Saladin, he chose as his residence the former palace of the Fatimid viziers.

Saladin certainly felt more comfortable now, as Nur al-Din had sent amirs whom he knew well and trusted. He had faced the sternest of challenges but had demonstrated shrewdness and calmness each time; already we can see the qualities which he would carry with him later in life – the careful planning, the cautiousness and the level-headedness. In addition, and to his great joy, his father Ayyub arrived from Syria and around him now gathered his brother Turan Shah and his nephew Taqi ul-Din, as well as two other brothers, al-Adil and Tughtekin.[8] Indeed the only other name that can be recognised as being in the same level of seniority during this period is Qaraqush. In gathering his family around him Saladin was simply conforming to the tradition of collective familial sovereignty which he had inherited from his father, and which Ayyub had taken from Shadi. They in turn viewed him as the rising star, who could lead the family to great things. Exactly one year earlier Saladin had stubbornly refused to return to Egypt, but now finally – despite the distant rumbling of plots and mutinies, which meant that the storm was never over – he could for the first time say he was in control of Egypt. This achievement was symbolised by the birth, in

Egypt, of his first son, al-Afdal. Finally more secure in Egypt, Saladin made his first move against the Franks when, in November 1170, he attacked Darum, which lay about 15 kilometres (9 miles) south of Gaza. The attack was fierce and Darum would have fallen had Amalric not moved to relieve it. Instead Saladin moved to Gaza, where he seized horses and cattle. He then secured his first success by capturing the castle of Eilat, before returning to Egypt in December 1170.

In June 1171 Nur al-Din, according to Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who was working as his secretary at that time, wrote to Saladin telling him to establish the Abbasid caliph's name in the Friday sermons. In fact Saladin, strengthened by his family and advised by al-Qadi al-Fadil, had already begun to dismantle the Fatimid caliphate and introduce the tenets of Sunni orthodoxy into Egypt. By the summer of 1170 the Shiite invocation of 'Hayy ala khayr al-amal' (come to the best of work) was eliminated from the call to prayer, and shortly afterwards the names of the first three Orthodox caliphs were put back in the Friday sermon in front of Ali's name. In the same summer Isa al-Hakkari was appointed as a Shafii judge in Cairo, and in March 1171 Saladin dismissed the Ismaili supreme judge of Egypt and replaced him with a Shafii one who was also a Kurd – Sadr al-Din Ibn al-Darbas al-Hadhabani, who wasted no time in replacing the Ismaili judges with Sunni ones. At the end of the summer of 1171 al-Adid began to show symptoms of a serious illness. In order to ensure that there could be no succession to the caliph, Saladin knew he had to move quickly. Subsequently, when he received an invitation from al-Adid to visit him in the palace, the cautious Saladin refused to go, as he feared treachery, though we are told he regretted this later. On 10 September 1171 the name of the Fatimid caliphate was dropped from the Friday prayer, but at this stage the Abbasid caliph's name was not proclaimed and the explanation for this is clear – Saladin was monitoring how the Egyptians would react. Tentative as he was by nature, he preferred to take his time, but to his delight the removal of al-Adid's name provoked no reaction and this encouraged him greatly. The following day, on the Saturday, Saladin proceeded with an impressive show of force and held a review of his troops in full sight of the Egyptians, and more importantly the Greek and Frankish envoys who were present. When news reached the frail, ill al-Adid that his name had been removed from the Friday sermon, he asked whose name had been inserted. When told that none had been, he replied, 'Next Friday it will be for a named man'. He

would not live to see the next Friday, for on the Monday, 13 September 1171, al-Adid, who had not yet reached his twenty-first birthday, passed away. News of al-Adid's death reached Saladin while he was seated with al-Qadi al-Fadil and their immediate responses dramatically revealed their mindsets: one that of a member of a military aristocracy, the other that of a bureaucrat trained in political chicanery. 'If we had known', Saladin remarked generously, 'that he would die this day, we would not have displeased him by eliminating his name from the [Friday] khutba [sermon].' To this remark, al-Qadi al-Fadil looked up and replied immediately, 'Had he known that you would not drop his name from the khutba, he would not have died'. Although al-Adid had left behind a young son, there was it seems no question of continuing with the Fatimid dynasty. The following evening – 14 September – Saladin made a public appearance at a palace gathering. It was unprecedented that a caliph should not be selected and those gathered that evening awaited to hear what Saladin had to say about the matter, but he chose to remain silent. Those still holding on to the hope of salvaging the Fatimid dynasty received their answer on the Friday 17 September, when the name of the Abbasid caliph was pronounced in the mosques of Fustat and Cairo.

The introduction of Sunni orthodoxy to Egypt

With Saladin, the spirit of Nizam ul-Mulk reached the land of Egypt. He may not have possessed the scholarly instincts of Nur al-Din or the literary habits of his closest adviser al-Qadi al-Fadil, who claimed that he had composed 250,000 verses of poetry, but in Saladin's public actions at least he was Nizam ul-Mulk's true spiritual heir. The first few months had been devoted to stabilising a land seething with rebellion and plots, but as things settled, and his family gathered around him, Saladin began to reveal that he truly was a child of the Sunni Revival. His Sunnism was esoterically ecumenical and exoterically intransigent – inwardly he was happy to accept the different strands of Islam, but outwardly he was rigorously against other religions, such as Christianity. Like most Kurds he was a Shafii, though in Egypt he showed great favour to the Malikis and Hanafis. Theologically he would have been an Asharite, though dogmatic theology never figured highly in his piety. His Islam was deeply infused with Sufism, though passively not actively, and we have already spoken about the influence of Abd

al-Qadir al-Jilani on those closest to Saladin: men such as Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri, Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama and Zein al-Din ibn Naja. He was also influenced by the ecumenicalism of the vizier to the Abbasids, Ibn Hubayra, whose effort to integrate moderate Shiism into the orthodox Sunni body was reciprocated by Saladin. We are fortunate to have an eye-witness in Ibn Jubayr, who wrote at a time when Saladin was at the height of his power and who noted that in the Friday sermons, both in Mecca and in Cairo, the preacher evoked at great length the merits of the Prophet Muhammad, the four orthodox caliphs, the uncles of the Prophet, and the sons of Ali (Hasan and al-Husayn), followed by the wives of the Prophet, thereby offering a formula which united the Sunni and Shiite sects.

How far-reaching and profound the roots of this new Sunni Revival would be can perhaps be better understood if viewed from a different perspective. Here we turn to the work done by Tabbaa on the fascinating development which took place in the writing of the Quran during this period. For the first three centuries of Islam, Tabbaa notes, the Quran had been written in an angular Kufic script, a script which was hard to read – in places almost illegible – since Qurans were written less to be read than as a validation for the recitation.[9] With the emergence of a new Sunnism, Quranic calligraphy was gradually changed from a Kufic script to a cursive one, one which reached its peak of excellence thanks to the pens of Ibn Muqla and Ibn Bawwab. This transformation was not a coincidence. The uncompromising clarity of the new script must be seen as a direct reflection of the Abbasid caliph's creed of the single and apparent truth in the Quran.[10] The illegibility of the Kufic script had been used symbolically by the Fatimids to emphasise the esoteric dimension of their religion, and in contrast the clarity of the cursive script affirmed the Sunni message. In other words it was not just the word, but the image of the word which became a symbol for the new Sunni orthodoxy. This symbol was rapidly assumed by those dynasties who carried the Sunni message in the east, such as Mahmud of Ghazna or Nur al-Din in Syria and Saladin in Egypt. The appropriation of the Quranic script was both an act of homage towards the caliphate that symbolised the Sunni orthodoxy as well as an attempt to legitimise the dynasty that was paying homage. In other words political unity, which was impossible to achieve, was replaced by ceremonial allegiance and caliphal symbols, which were intended to reduce the gap between reality and myth. The calligraphic transformation was one of the most visible and direct signs

of the adoption of the Sunni Revival, and the new cursive script was rapidly adopted in public monumental inscriptions as an endorsement of Sunnism. By 1174, and thanks largely to Nur al-Din, its use had become widely adopted throughout Syria and upper Mesopotamia. Indeed the only place which resisted this new script was Fatimid Egypt, and it was Saladin who introduced it, an introduction that was as much a political statement as it was a creative one. With the arrival of Saladin in Egypt, the Fatimid Kufic script, the glory and pride of Fatimid art, was to be used no more in inscriptions. Not only was the script transformed, the size and length of the inscriptions were lowered from their elevated location as friezes and made to cut across the walls and supports of the building. The combination of the increased legibility of the script together with the lowering of the inscriptional band created an image of a clear and direct message which announced the beginning of a new Sunni era.[11] In the Mudarraj Gate of the Cairo citadel an inscription from the period of Saladin still remains. As Tabbaa points out, the most striking aspect about it is the poor quality of the script: a spindly line, inconsistent letter forms, and neither points nor vowel marks all reflect the inexperience of the calligraphers in this new calligraphic style.[12] One imagines Saladin busily importing calligraphers from Syria to teach their Egyptian counterparts the new cursive script.

It was during the siege of Alexandria that Saladin first came across the two giants of Islamic sciences – al-Silafi and Ibn Awf. He was quick to pay homage to both men and travelled often to Alexandria, where he attended their respective madrasas and listened to hadith from both men. As a fellow Shafii, there is no doubt that Saladin kept very close to al-Silafi and turned to him on many occasions, as did his brother al-Adil and his nephew Taqi ul-Din. For example, when confronted with a thorny question relating to inheritance among Jews under his rule, Saladin turned to two men to give him their legal opinions: al-Silafi for the Shafii viewpoint and Ibn Awf for the Maliki one. However, Saladin was not a serious scholar, as was demonstrated on one occasion when he and his brother al-Adil attended one of al-Silafi's classes. For a while the two brothers listened intently, but soon enough their attention began to wander and they started chatting to each other, only to be reprimanded sharply by al-Silafi. In any case as the leading Shafii jurist in Egypt, it was not surprising that al-Silafi would quickly come to the attention of Saladin, who urgently needed Shafii jurists to help him administer. What is remarkable is the number of people who served under

Saladin who studied at one stage at al-Silafi's madrasa. The most famous, apart from Saladin, were al-Qadi al-Fadil and Isa al-Hakkari, but by no means were they all Shafiis; Abul Majid al-Iskandarani for example, known as Kamal al-Din, who was the head of the diwan of Upper Egypt and who studied hadith under al-Silafi, was a Maliki.[13]

If the aim of establishing madrasas was to produce Sunni jurists who could administer, then Ibn Awf's contribution was no less significant than that of al-Silafi, and among his students – reflecting the new breed of scholar/administrator that was the product of the madrasa – was Ibn al-Mujawir, who would become Saladin's son's vizier and who was born in Iran and assumed power in Egypt. Another was Abul-Qasim al-Makhzumi, known as al-Ashraf, who joined Saladin's government and was head of the bureaucracy. An administrator but also a scholar, his work in government did not stop him teaching hadith in Alexandria, Damascus and Baghdad.

As soon as Saladin had stabilised his position politically, the question that began to dominate his thinking was where he would build his first madrasa. Alexandria he knew well and loved, for its people had stood strong and firm with him during Shawar's siege. Furthermore, previously all madrasas had been built in Alexandria. But Alexandria was not Egypt, the land over which Saladin now ruled. A bold and public statement needed to be made – making a declaration towards his political masters in Damascus and Baghdad as well as broadening his appeal among the Sunnis of Egypt. And so Saladin chose to build his first madrasa in Fustat. Fustat but not Cairo. His cautious nature made him wary and perhaps he did not feel his position was strong enough to test the unpredictable reaction of the Shiites if a Sunni madrasa was built in their capital. So at this stage there was no need for provocation and the choice of Fustat was ideal – not Cairo, but close enough to cast a Sunni shadow. In the actions of great men one can never rule out personal ambition and Saladin may have realised that he gained no benefit in building a madrasa in Alexandria. After all, the city was already loyal. At the same time, and on a more personal level, he clearly must have wanted his first madrasa to shine, and one of the first decisions he would have had to make was to appoint a professor. Now Alexandria was a city confident in its knowledge in an age when education was judged not on *loci* but on *personae*.[14] It mattered little where a student studied, what mattered above all was with whom he studied. Alexandria, as we have seen, was blessed with two intellectual giants and the city's seekers of knowledge

were spoiled for choice. Saladin knew both men well, and one can only surmise that he was advised that in this abundant market of knowledge, another madrasa would be overshadowed.

So Fustat it was. And not just anywhere in Fustat, but right next to the the mosque of Amr Ibn al-As – the very heart of the Sunni community, to which the madrasa had direct access. In addition, Saladin's own residence was nearby so daily he would have watched the construction. Nothing was left to chance. Throughout his life Saladin always chose his dates carefully for their religious symbolism, and it was not an accident that it was on the first day of the new Muslim year of 566 (1170) that construction of his madrasa commenced. Even the location held symbolic significance – a prison just south of the Amr mosque was torn down to make way. The message could not be clearer: the building that represented the coercive power of the Fatimid regime was turned into an institution identified with Sunni Islam.[15] A pious endowment was established for the maintenance of the madrasa – known as al-Nasiriyyah – which included a goldsmiths' market and a village, probably in Fayyum, as well as properties adjacent to it such as an oven, a bathhouse and shops. Included also in the endowment was the Island of Elephants. It was, of course, a Shafii madrasa and the first mudarris appointed was Ibn Zain al-Tujjar. Originally from Damascus, he may have come to Egypt with Shirkuh, and it does seem that Saladin knew him from Damascus. The choice was an uncontroversial one and perhaps in this matter Saladin was too cautious, for Ibn Zain managed to teach at al-Nasiriyyah for 25 years without making a significant impact. In short, and in comparison with the two giants of Alexandria, the stature of the professor barely filled the grandeur of the madrasa. Such a low profile tempts the question of whether Saladin purposely chose a mediocre mudarris, whom he could easily manage,[16] but it is more likely that he chose someone whom he knew well and trusted and who simply turned out to be a poor teacher. Nur al-Din would perhaps have devoted more attention in selecting a more suitable professor for such an important position. It would not, as we shall see, be the first time that Saladin would choose badly. Suffice to say that the originality of al-Nasiriyyah being the first madrasa in Fustat and its proximity to the Amr mosque secured its status, contradicting the usual maxim in medieval Islamic education that one's teacher mattered, but the venue did not.

Islamic education during this period remained essentially informal and flexible to the extreme. There was no curriculum nor any attempt to

institutionalise education, nor was there any formal procedure of admission based on previous educational qualifications. Permission of the teacher was required, otherwise students were able to attend any study circle they desired. One searches in vain for a programme which trained bureaucrats; indeed, such a curriculum would have been totally alien. It appears that a grounding in Islamic law was sufficient. Above all, the loyalty of the student remained overwhelmingly to the teacher and not to the location; the professor made the madrasa and not the other way round. Knowledge was a highly personal process and was dependent upon the relationship between the teacher and the student. Thus biographies of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Baghdadi scholars make almost no mention of the madrasas in which they studied, even though this information was widely known; instead they feature the list of teachers with whom the individual studied. The actual location where the studies took place must be reconstructed from the context. The reason for this was that teachers imparted more than knowledge to their pupils, and they also imparted authority over texts and learning that could be transmitted only through some form of direct personal contact.[17] This transmission took the form of an ijaza (licence) issued by a shaykh to a student, and the ijaza quickly became the standard means by which Muslim learning was passed on.[18] Even people who had books but no teachers with whom to study tried to get close to the author – we read about a scholar who while studying the works of Ibn Arabi made visitations to his tomb to read his books there. This was because knowledge was seen as a form of blessing (baraka) and was independent of the book that contained it; the shaykhs who taught it partook of it and became infused by it in ways which today the secular mind would find incomprehensible. Damascenes, for example, seeking baraka, drank the water in which the scholar Ibn Taymiyya did his ablutions. In any case the books themselves were simply an aid to memorisation: Ibn Khallikan related the story of a scholar who claimed that if all al-Shafii's books were burned it would matter little to him, as he could write them out himself from memory.

Many students travelled to study with professors, collect hadith and obtain ijazas before settling down. It was customary for students, often in their twenties though sometimes much older, to leave their city of origin and travel to other cities to study. This was called the rihla, the journey. The distances that were travelled were immense. Scholars in Iran and Spain read books written in Egypt and law professorships in Baghdad were filled by

scholars born in Damascus. It was not uncommon for a scholar to be born in Alexandria and die in China. The example of Hasan al-Andalusi is a good if certainly not rare one. A native of Valencia, Hasan travelled as a young man all the way to China to collect hadith, before making his way to the Nizamiyya in Baghdad to study law with al-Ghazali. Some students studied with many professors; others stayed with the same professor for many years, often acting as his companion. Inevitably social bonds were born and relationships developed. Frequently a young scholar married the daughter of a native-born professor. In this way inter-city marriage alliances began to exist. Nor did travel mean that the scholars lost touch with each other, and letters were an easy and accessible form of communication. The letters did not concern themselves with scholarly subjects only, and political and military matters were keenly discussed. When a famous scholar died, people around the Islamic world mourned him.[19] There is no question that this resulted in the formation of a strong, cosmopolitan, intellectual elite[20] and the establishment of networks of learning and knowledge, which tied Islamic lands together in ways that political events, no matter how seismic, could hope to. If we stress this point, it is because its implications were profound.

Chapter 7

The Prize of Syria

Let us not remove him from our allegiance, he is stronger than we are.
Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri

It is impossible to overstress the influence of Nur al-Din on Saladin. Saladin had grown up in Nur al-Din's court and both his father and uncle had served him loyally. Now, even though he was master of Egypt, he lived in Nur al-Din's shadow. Ideologically there was little to choose between them, although the men were naturally different. Nur al-Din was a deep thinker and an avid collector and reader of hadith, while Saladin was clearly less intellectual but equally sincere in his adherence to the principles of Sunni orthodoxy. Both had tremendous respect for holy men and were drawn to sufism, though once again Saladin was content to bow to those with greater knowledge. There was an austerity in both men and an asceticism, although one gets the impression that there was a rigour in Nur al-Din which in Saladin's case was softened by a natural kindness that often brought him to tears. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who served both men as secretary (and who incidentally also served Ibn Hubayra), had no doubt about Saladin's ideological indebtedness to Nur al-Din, for he wrote that Saladin modelled himself on all the qualities of Nur al-Din.

Nevertheless, as Saladin's position in Egypt began to assume a level of normality it was inevitable that a tension between the two men should surface. The root of this tension was simple: what was to become of Egypt?

Once again Imad al-Din al-Isfahani summed up the dilemma: 'Since the time that Egypt was taken Nur al-Din had wanted an agreed sum of money to be contributed which would help him meet the expenses of the holy war . . . He was waiting for Saladin to suggest this on his own account and did not ask him for it'. In other words Nur al-Din needed Egypt to financially subsidise his campaigns in Syria. The fact was both men had come to power through their military strengths and had no Islamic right to rule, and neither fitted the requirements of the Sharia.[1] In that sense they needed to justify legally what they had seized by force, and legitimisation could only come from the caliph. Nur al-Din needed to show the caliph that he had restored Ismaili Egypt to the Sunni fold and he grew increasingly restive as Saladin hesitated in doing so. Saladin, on the other hand, would not be rushed; in any case his nature was not one of haste. Nur al-Din was also unaware of the dangers of rebellion and plots that lurked in the shadows of Cairo. The threat of internal trouble, though diminished, had not receded totally and around April 1174 another Fatimid plot was put down. The plot was said to have involved a cocktail of those who held grievances against Saladin: Fatimids, Armenians, Sudanese and others who had had their lands dispossessed. The plot was quickly uncovered and crushed, though once again we are thrown into the murky world of informers and agent provocateurs: the two men who had infiltrated the plotters and then betrayed them were Ibn Masal, who had become very close to Saladin when they endured the siege of Alexandria, and the shadowy Ibn Naja, who seems to have had a foot both in Nur al-Din's camp and the Fatimid one.

There is no doubt that Saladin shared Nur al-Din's desire to end what he perceived as a Shiite heresy, but his first priority was to build a strong force to hold Egypt. 'Saladin had to act as a true ruler of Egypt', writes Ehrenkreutz, 'following a policy dictated by the interests of Egypt, not by those of a foreign power'.[2] In other words, Egypt could not do Syria's bidding. At the same time, personal factors must have come into play as Saladin began to appreciate the enormous wealth and resources to be found in the land of the Nile. He may well have recalled that when his uncle had returned after the second campaign, Nur al-Din had compensated him with Homs, and he now saw that the whole of Homs was smaller than Cairo, let alone Egypt. If he were to return now to Syria, could he expect any better than Homs? He had been reluctant to come to Egypt, but now he understood that he would be a fool to leave. How deep the tension was between

the two men is hard to fathom. Ibn al-Athir writes of an Ayyubid family council in which Taqi ul-Din showed open defiance towards Nur al-Din, while the wise Ayyub took Saladin aside and counselled prudence. Since the Zengid and notoriously anti-Saladin Ibn al-Athir mentioned that this conversation was held in private between the two men, one wonders how he would have been privy to it, and one suspects that it was nothing more than one of the historian's fabrications, worthy of Thucydides. Although Ehrenkreutz insists that Nur al-Din was quick to undermine Saladin with 'obstructionist measure or gestures' calculated to undermine his authority,[3] and quoting Ibn al-Athir he points to his confiscation of Shirkuh's lands in Homs as proof of his displeasure, one can interpret Nur al-Din's speed of action in a different light; above all his realisation that Shirkuh's son, Nasr al-Din, was too young to hold such an important frontier post.

The truth is we do not know how badly the relations between the two men deteriorated. Admittedly by the summer of 1174 Nur al-Din began to muster troops from Mosul and upper Mesopotamia, but was he seriously thinking of advancing on Egypt? He had, after all, not hesitated in sending troops to aid Saladin when he had been attacked by Amalric and the Byzantines, and he must have known that nothing would have been more to the Franks' advantage than a conflict between Syria and Egypt. Although the situation was moving towards a breaking point, there was still room for diplomacy. In the winter of 1173 Nur al-Din decided to despatch al-Muwaffaq Ibn al-Qaisarani to carry out a full audit of Egypt's revenues. What was clear was that he was looking to receive an annual tribute from Egypt and he was also asserting his authority over Saladin. If the relationship between the two men had reached breaking point, then one assumes that Saladin would have resisted such a provocative move, but it appears that Ibn al-Qaisarani faced no obstacles and Saladin allowed him access to all the accounts. It is interesting to note that Saladin chose Isa al-Hakkari, who was instrumental in his appointment as vizier, to accompany Ibn al-Qaisarani to Egypt.

The death of Nur al-Din and Amalric

As things turned out Nur al-Din never received Ibn al-Qaisarani's audit, for in May 1174 he fell ill and died suddenly. A few months earlier, Ayyub had passed away so Saladin had, over a brief period of time, lost the two men

who had the most influence over him. With Turan Shah campaigning in the Yemen, Saladin effectively found himself the most senior member of his family. Had Nur al-Din lived then it would be fair to say that Saladin would have been relegated to a footnote in history and that this book would have been Nur al-Din's biography. With Syria and Egypt under Nur al-Din's control and with Mosul in his brother's hand, he would have undoubtedly turned his attention towards Jerusalem. But on such fortuitous events as a natural death, history turns, and so does the fate of men. From the moment that Nur al-Din died, Saladin assumed the role of his protégé and his ideological heir. Without Nur al-Din, there would have been no Saladin, and only two things differentiated them; the first obviously was that Saladin conquered Jerusalem, and the second, less obvious but just as important, was that Nur al-Din did not have the genius of al-Qadi al-Fadil to mould his image. If Saladin had thought that the death of Nur al-Din would remove the shadow of his master, then he was mistaken, for that cast by the house of Zengi was even more ominous. What Nur al-Din had held together through the force of personality now unravelled with bewildering pace, as the members of his family, who shared his ambition but not his abilities, began to jostle to fill the political vacuum. Nur al-Din had left behind an 11-year-old son, al-Salih, in whose youthful character and comportment one could already detect characteristics of his father, but he also left behind two nephews, Imad al-Din Zengi in Sinjar and Saif al-Din Ghazi in Mosul, in whom one searched in vain for similar virtues. Little love was lost between the two brothers: the venerable Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri had once warned Nur al-Din that the house of Zengi would end at their hands.

When news broke in Mosul of Nur al-Din's death, Saif al-Din chose not to mourn but to celebrate. He did so by declaring a public holiday, allowing wine to be drunk openly in the city and reinstating the illegal taxes which had been abolished by Nur al-Din. Freed of his guardian, Saif al-Din, who clearly considered himself to be the senior member of the Zengi household, immediately captured Nasibin, Harran, al-Ruha, al-Raqqa and all the territories of the Jazira (upper Mesopotamia) except for Sinjar. The temptation was to cross the Euphrates, but prudence prevailed and the Mosuli army withdrew to the east. Meanwhile Aleppo positioned itself accordingly and, after much skulduggery, succeeded in seizing al-Salih, Nur al-Din's son and heir apparent, who was too young to rule and too valuable to be left uncontrolled from Damascus. With al-Salih under its control, Aleppo firmly

claimed to hold the key to legitimacy and authority. In Damascus in the meantime a number of Nur al-Din's officials, alarmed by developments in Aleppo and fearful of the aggression of the Latin Kingdom, took an oath to act together and appointed one of Nur al-Din's senior commanders, Ibn al-Muqaddam, as army commander.

As for the Latin Kingdom, Nur al-Din's death removed from the political map their most dangerous foe. Under him Syria had become united, and with the addition of Egypt the possibility of an Islamic pincer movement from the north and south had become an ominous reality. Amalric had endeavoured to prevent Egypt falling to Nur al-Din, but he had failed in that endeavour. Now he wasted no time in taking advantage of the Syrian fragmentation and attacked Banias, which controlled the main road from Damascus to Upper Galilee. However, he had not accounted for the presence of Nur al-Din's wife, who was in Banias and who cajoled and rallied to defend it until a truce was reached and Amalric called off the siege.

But all – Mosul, Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem – kept a wary eye on Egypt and Saladin. So far he had not acted, but it was clear that the wealth which Egypt afforded him meant that, when he did so, he would be a force to be reckoned with. The wise counsellor to Zengi and Nur al-Din, Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri, advised caution, for he knew Saladin well. 'Let us not remove him from our allegiance', Kamal al-Din warned, 'he is stronger than we are'. But the question which was asked by all was what were Saladin's intentions? Was he really the champion of the holy war or a warlord usurper? These are questions that over the years have divided historians to such a degree that it is difficult to think of another historical personality who has attracted as much awe and opprobrium in equal measure. Was he the Saladin of whom Gibb writes, 'For a brief and decisive moment, by sheer goodness and firmness of character, he raised Islam out of the rut of political demoralization'?[4] Or, on the other hand, was he the Saladin whose most significant historical accomplishments should be attributed, according to Ehrenkreutz 'to his ruthless persecution and execution of political opponents and dissenters, to his vindictive belligerence and calculated opportunism, and to his readiness to compromise religious ideals to political expediency'?[5]

We do not know what is in the hearts of men, but the historian can pass judgement on their actions. What is, above all, striking about Saladin was the dogged tenacity and consistency of his claim to be the champion of the holy war. Whether he believed in it or not, he followed this course

unswervingly, with the kind of single-mindedness of purpose which is associated with great figures down the ages.[6] He was, he claimed, the natural political and ideological heir of Nur al-Din and, sincere or not, he never deviated from this line. And yet, as Lyons and Jackson put it, 'The black and white of the Holy War, however fairly it may convey Saladin's own ideals, was an oversimplification in respect of the need for an immediate, practical and coherent policy'.[7] To put it another way, Saladin may have believed in the holy war but he had to contend with the politics of the holy war and therein lay the jarring that has given birth to the divergent views. Above all he, and the men who surrounded him, were realists – men with few illusions. He himself would have seen no contradiction in being both a mujahid (one who carried out jihad) and someone who played the game of power politics; his father, after all, had been a consummate player. Saladin aspired to build an empire, in the same way that Zengi and Nur al-Din had done. The politics of Syria demanded constant expansion to satisfy the ambitions of his amirs and to ensure their loyalty. Above all this aspiration reflected personal and family territorial ambitions and the desire to establish a dynasty. For Saladin it would have been madness to think otherwise. Personal virtue had nothing to do with this matter; it was a question of survival. The political vacuum of the age respected force more than ideology.

And yet as Saladin viewed the political developments in Syria it can fairly be said that more than ambition was at stake. An ideology did exist and it is with Nur al-Din and then with Saladin that we can finally speak of an alliance being forged between the military leadership and the religious classes. It is not a coincidence that both men were also the great champions of the Sunni Revival in Syria and Egypt, and the patrons of many madrasas and religious institutions. The call for jihad – initially uttered by voices in the wilderness such as al-Sulami – was now being echoed throughout the madrasas of Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia, creating a momentum which could be neither ignored nor resisted. We have spoken of an alliance earlier in Baghdad between al-Ghazali and Nizam ul-Mulk which laid the foundations of the Sunni Revival, and now another alliance emerged between the ulama/administrators who preached the message of spiritual renunciation and jihad and the military amirs who carried out this message. This alliance fed off each other: the military patrons built madrasas which attracted professors and students, who in turn vocally clamoured for jihad. The greater the number of madrasas the greater was the clamour, and the greater the

clamour the more the pressure became on the military leadership to act, until it became irresistible. In this alliance it was the religious scholars who set the agenda. For them, whether Saladin privately was a sincere champion of jihad or an opportunistic warlord eager to further his career was a matter that could be left to God to decide. Saladin could fight the jihad willingly or reluctantly, what mattered was that he fought it. To an extent Saladin's early success trapped him into a political course which he had to follow. In the words of Jackson, he had as a young man travelled too far up the political scale for him to be able to go back down it or even to stay where he was.[8] And even if he had wanted to act otherwise, the ulama who needed him would not have allowed him to do so.

Saladin heard the news of Nur al-Din's death from the Franks and he immediately wrote to Damascus to make sure the news was not simply rumour. When it was confirmed, he held a three-day mourning period, he also wrote to al-Salih offering his condolences, and on the first Friday after Nur al-Din's death the sermon was pronounced in al-Salih's name. As Saladin surveyed the political scene in Syria from Cairo several issues played on his mind. Certainly, the seizure of al-Salih by the Aleppans angered him: 'How have they dared do this?' he wrote to Ibn al-Muqaddam. He wrote at once to Aleppo, but it seems that the Aleppans did not think that he would leave Egypt and advance on Syria.[9] But still Saladin bided his time, for he was aware he could not overplay his hand; vexing anger at al-Salih's 'imprisonment' was one thing, but too much protestation would simply inflame the distrust that elements in Syria had of his intentions. At the same time, Amalric's move on Banias alarmed him and, on hearing of the Frankish advance, he had marched out with troops, only for news to reach him that a truce had been agreed. In Saladin's opinion the truce signalled the weakness of Damascus. Therein lay an opportunity, of course, but equally a danger, for a weak Damascus could easily fall within the Mosul orbit, which in turn would mean that Syria would be pulled away from Egypt – and that could only be to the advantage of the Franks. If, however, Saladin were to advance on Syria he would be seen as a usurper, for al-Salih had clearly been appointed as Nur al-Din's successor and Saladin could not be seen to go against his master's wishes. 'I am in one valley and those who think ill of me are in another' he defended himself, but at the same time he was equally adamant in a letter, addressed to Ibn al-Muqaddam, that had Nur al-Din had a commander whom he trusted more than Saladin then he would have

entrusted Egypt to him. He then, somewhat disingenuously, went on to argue that had Nur al-Din lived he would have entrusted the upbringing of al-Salih to him. Of all facts however, one was the most clear: until Saladin acted, the situation in Syria would remain fragmented.

What was equally clear was that if the call to jihad was going to be the bulwark of Saladin's legitimacy then Syria had to be the centre of his empire. At what stage the idea of the transition from Egypt to Syria occurred to Saladin is not obvious – certainly there were no such thoughts while Nur al-Din was alive – but if he was going to style himself as the heir of Nur al-Din then he had to move to Damascus in order to perpetuate the legacy of the Zengid unifier of Syria. The move to Syria, both political and symbolic, was not taken lightly, nor was it without its detractors – none more so than al-Qadi al-Fadil himself, who believed that Egypt was being abandoned for Syria. Saladin did not need to move into Syria; he could have remained in Egypt, where he had successfully asserted his authority and where there was more wealth and opportunity to be gained than the whole of Syria. He was also under no pressure to move into Syria and was drawn there not by outside political events but by the power vacuum. But once the decision to move to Syria had been made, then the message could not deviate, and so Imad al-Din al-Isfahani asks in a letter, 'What are the ancient pyramids in comparison to the honoured precincts of Jerusalem?' It was the emphasis of Syria as the home to Jerusalem which played a central role in the arguments of Saladin's scribes during this period.

While Saladin pondered this dilemma, even more dramatic news reached him: Amalric was dead. He had returned from Banias feeling unwell, began to suffer from dysentery and died on 14 July 1174. Within two months the two giants of Syria, Nur al-Din and Amalric, had died. Already in Saladin's early career the opportune deaths of Shirkuh, then the Fatimid caliph al-Adid had opened the doors of power in Egypt; now the deaths of Nur al-Din and Amalric opened those of Syria. If luck needs to be considered as a factor in a great man's rise to power, then Saladin was indeed lucky. One more death would follow which would help ease his path to power, but of that we shall write later. Saladin would certainly have been less confident in his march on Damascus had Amalric still been alive, for Amalric might have challenged the inevitability of the triumph of Islam.[10] His son Baldwin IV, who was 13 years of age, had been accepted as king by the barons, as he was the only remaining prince of the royal house. Born in 1161, the young

king was named after his father's elder brother King Baldwin III, who became his godfather. The story is told that when asked what christening present he would give the infant, Baldwin III replied 'The Kingdom of Jerusalem'. It was, of course, said in jest, since Baldwin III was 31 years of age, newly married and the prospect of his nephew assuming the throne was a remote one. Yet less than two years later he died childless and Amalric became king.

There was no disputing Baldwin IV's claim to the throne. His coronation was held on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the capture of Jerusalem by the First Crusade and he was crowned as the sixth Latin King of Jerusalem. But though there was no disputing his claim, his accession had not been an automatic one, and a few days passed before it took place; a fact noted by Saladin. The reason for this delay was quite dramatic. One day, as Baldwin and his friends were playing and wrestling, as was the nature of boys of his age, his tutor William of Tyre noticed something quite peculiar about the young king: he felt no pain. No matter how hard his friends dug their nails into his arm, he did not flinch. At once William was troubled, for he feared the worst, and his fear was later confirmed; Baldwin was a leper and his life would be short. How long he would reign was not clear, and Raymond of Tripoli, 'a tall thin man, dark-haired and dark-skinned, his face dominated by a great nose',[11] who spoke Arabic fluently and who understood the way of the Muslims as well as any of the Franks, was appointed as regent to the young king.

The power struggle in Syria

It was apparent to all that the Kingdom of Jerusalem was seriously threatened by a resurgent Islam.[12] As early as 1175 William of Tyre had recognised that Saladin was unlike the other Muslim leaders and was clear about the threat posed by him: 'Any increase of Saladin's power was cause for suspicions in our eyes . . . For he was a wise man in counsel, valiant in war, and generous beyond measure'. He then advocated that the Franks support al-Salih in Aleppo 'not for his own sake, but to encourage him as an adversary against Saladin'. Indeed, the Franks' Syrian policy in the following years was entirely directed towards preventing Saladin making himself master of the Zengid kingdoms of Aleppo and Mosul. Already Edessa had been lost, and Nur al-Din's victory at Harim had rendered Antioch impotent to offer any

aid. This effectively meant that to prevent Muslim encirclement the Franks desperately needed military support, and the first place they sought help from was Western Europe. From 1160 onwards when, with the rise of Nur al-Din, it was becoming clear that the Muslim revanche was gathering an ominous pace, letters and envoys were despatched to Europe appealing for a new crusade. Admittedly some of these appeals found a favourable response from individuals who led their own private crusades, such as Philip of Flanders, but what the settlers urgently demanded was a large-scale crusade and they fruitlessly focused their appeals on Louis VII of France and Henry II of England. At the same time the Latin Kingdom turned its attention to Byzantium. King Baldwin III chose to develop close ties with Constantinople and in 1158 married a member of the Greek imperial family. Nine years later Amalric did the same. In fact Amalric's dramatic journey to Constantinople – the first time the Latin King of Jerusalem had left his domains – was a sign of how desperate the situation had become. He was received with great cordiality and he recognised Manuel, the Byzantine emperor, as his overlord.[13] There is no doubt that this alliance helped the Franks; Nur al-Din, fearful of Byzantine reprisals became more cautious in pressing home his advantages more aggressively. Nevertheless, William of Tyre wrote that the Franks were under such pressure that it was as if they were being ground between two millstones. As time would show, the union of Damascus and Cairo was a situation which represented the deadliest threat of all to the existence of Latin Syria.[14]

Meanwhile, for Ibn al-Muqaddam in Damascus the situation was precarious, for the city was dangerously exposed and could not survive long in this sea of Syrian anarchy. On the one hand it faced the threat of an Aleppan–Mosuli pact and on the other that of the Franks. Saladin's intentions were unknown to Ibn al-Muqaddam, but his character and background were not. Damascus was, after all, Saladin's city; he had grown up there and of course his father had played a prominent role in the city's political life and had, by all accounts, been greatly respected. We have seen earlier that Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri had warned against ignoring him and it is of interest that Kamal al-Din was one of the first people that Saladin paid a visit to after his entry into the city. There was, of course, a danger involved in inviting an Egyptian force to Damascus and Ibn al-Muqaddam would have been well aware of this, but the military and political realities on the ground and the necessity to ensure that Damascus was not left

unguarded forced his hand, and so he wrote to Egypt and to Saladin and, in doing so, was the first person to invite him to Syria. This was the opportunity that Saladin was waiting for and, his usual caution thrown to the wind, he now acted with remarkable speed. Taking with him only 700 riders, he set off in October 1174 and reached the outskirts of Damascus by the end of the month. There he was greeted by a few dignitaries, among whom was his cousin and Shirkuh's son, Nasr al-Din. The Syrians were surprised by the speed of Saladin's action and were disturbed by the fact that he appeared to travel with so few men. When Shams al-Din of Busra, who was another of those who had invited Saladin to Syria and who as a result had tied his fate accordingly, enquired of al-Qadi al-Fadil how much money Saladin had brought with him, assuring him that if he had a lot of money then Syria would be his, al-Qadi al-Fadil replied that Saladin carried with him only 50,000 dinars. At that point a shocked Shams al-Din struck his head in horror and exclaimed, 'You are lost and you have destroyed us!' The truth, as al-Qadi al-Fadil wrote, was Saladin only had 10,000 dinars.

So how does one explain Saladin's hasty actions, especially since it seemed to go so much against his character? The temptation is to believe that the allure of Syria was too strong to resist and that he rushed in, but that would be to misjudge Saladin, who was rarely hasty in his decisions. The fact was it was a bold and brilliant move, for although he did not know what reaction he would receive in Syria, he did know Syria as well as anyone. Undoubtedly he saw himself as the spiritual and ideological heir of Nur al-Din and he needed to act accordingly. His aim therefore was not to defeat the Zengid house by military force but by moral persuasion. He knew that he needed Nur al-Din's army to side with him. Nur al-Din's men had split up following his death and about two-thirds of his army went to serve al-Salih in Aleppo while the remainder was placed under the command of Ibn al-Muqaddam in Damascus. They were the key, for they were fiercely loyal to Nur al-Din and to his son, and Saladin had to win them over. To use an unfortunate modern parlance, he sought to win Syrian hearts and minds and the way to do that was to create an irresistible moral and psychological current in his favour. Morality needed of course to be softened by liberality and generosity, for the Syrians were nothing if not traders – after all Shams al-Din's first question to al-Qadi al-Fadil was how much money Saladin had brought with him. The fact that Saladin had brought with him little money was in reality not much of an issue, since credit

transfers (known as hawala) were common. What mattered above all was the manner of Saladin's entry into Syria: not as a foreign invader at the head of an army, but as a natural son returning home. He would march into Damascus not by force but in triumph, and as he approached the city he calculated more and more amirs would flock to his side. There was in reality little haste in Saladin's planning and much thought.

Saladin marches into Syria, and the challenge of Aleppo

In the meantime, Damascus opened its gates to Saladin. His first action was to pray in the Umayyad mosque, while his second was to spend the night in his father's house: two calculatedly symbolic acts. At once the markets were ordered to reopen and looters were warned of severe punishment. Money was also spent liberally to win people's favours. The result was what Saladin had hoped for – no serious opposition, and a wary welcome from the city where he had grown up. So far things had progressed as he had anticipated, but he clearly understood two things: first, that having embarked on the Syrian adventure he could not stop at Damascus, since although it was the key to southern Syria, without controlling Aleppo it would remain vulnerable to attacks from the north; and second, that this campaign would not be easy. Saladin was under no illusion that Aleppo and Mosul would resist, but what he may not have realised was how personally dangerous it would turn out to be. The problem was that the Zengids of Aleppo and Mosul regarded Saladin as little more than a usurper and his claim to be Nur al-Din's spiritual and ideological heir was dismissed with disdain by Nur al-Din's family and by his mamluks – the Nuriya – who remained ferociously loyal to their master's memory. A dog that barks at his master was one of the many insults levelled at Saladin. He was also, and this is an important point, not a Turk but a Kurd in an age when the Turkish princes of Syria – and of Mosul in particular – regarded the Kurds as decidedly inferior. In a way his position was not dissimilar to that of Napoleon – a Corsican – in post-revolutionary France.

The first signs of trouble appeared while Saladin was still in Damascus. An embassy from Aleppo arrived, headed by Qutb al-Din Inal, a man Saladin knew well, for he had accompanied him on Shirkuh's final expedition to Egypt. The tense meeting did not go well. Pointing to his sword,

Qutb al-Din warned Saladin to return from whence he had come. Aleppo did not welcome him to Syria, he declared, since he was an aggressor who had come to betray his master. To this Saladin responded that he had come to unify Syria and to oversee the upbringing of al-Salih until he reached the age of maturity. Nevertheless, it was clear that Saladin was shaken by the hostility shown and this is reflected in two letters he wrote subsequently. The first was to Ibn Naja in Egypt, in which he insisted that 'our move was not made in order to snatch a kingdom for ourselves, but to set up the standard of the holy war'. He then wrote of the 'men who had become enemies, preventing the accomplishment of our purpose with regard to this war'. Interestingly the second letter was written to Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri, and in it he complained about the 'feeble minds' which opposed him. The recipients of the two letters were the two men who, it could be fairly said, exerted the most spiritual influence on Saladin, and the letters need to be seen as attempts to win their approval. The attempt to justify his actions is also indicative that Saladin was well aware of the criticisms that were being levelled at him.

It was crucial that the momentum gained on the march to Damascus be carried on. Above all Saladin could not allow himself to fall into the trap of besieging cities and thereby be perceived as an invader. His hope was that, like its southern sister, Aleppo would open its gates without the spilling of blood. Saladin also knew that he had to move fast so as to build up a momentum, and so within 40 days of Damascus opening its gates to him, he was camping outside Homs, which lies halfway between Aleppo and Damascus. Homs, it should be recalled, had been granted to Shirkuh by Nur al-Din, who had then removed it from Shirkuh's son following his father's death and granted it to Fakhr al-Din al-Zafarani. Understandably, Saladin was anxious as he approached Homs, since he could not have known whether the city would welcome him. He had no need to worry, as Fakhr al-Din joined his service. Fakhr al-Din was important for another reason, since he was one of Nur al-Din's senior army commanders and it was they, above all, whom Saladin needed to win over. On 10 December 1174 Homs fell to Saladin and once again money was distributed liberally to smooth any disruptions. Saladin then turned his attention to Hama, which was held by someone whom he knew very well, for Izz al-Din Jurdik had once helped him in the arrest – and possible slaying – of Shawar in Egypt. The two men met and it was agreed that Hama would be surrendered to Saladin and that

the citadel should be held by Jurdik's brother. As for Jurdik himself, he would travel to Aleppo to test the waters and see if there was any room for negotiations. Clearly Saladin had faith in him and entrusted him on this diplomatic mission, but it went terribly wrong, for no sooner had Jurdik arrived in Aleppo than he was arrested and thrown in a dungeon. Nevertheless Saladin remained determined that Aleppo would welcome him and he was confident enough to pun that he only had to do the milking (halab is the Arabic word for both milk and of the city) and Aleppo will be his. He knew the city well, perhaps not as well as Damascus where he had grown up, but he had travelled north on many occasions with his uncle Shirkuh, who had served as Nur al-Din's deputy there. He also knew that the city which the Franks had never been able to capture would not be easily entered by force, for its fortifications were formidable. The main problem that confronted Saladin was that Aleppo had no intention of surrendering. And so when he finally reached Aleppo, in the first days of 1175, he found a city defiant and ready to resist. It was a cold welcome in the midst of a bitterly cold winter and the incessant rain lashed against the tents surrounding the city and extinguished any fires which the men had lit in an attempt to stay warm.

As long as the Aleppans controlled the young al-Salih, they knew that they had a strong moral claim. Nur al-Din's son was now brought out to address the crowds and when he burst into tears it further strengthened the Aleppan resolve to resist. Clearly however the tears of the boy would not be enough to defend the city and Aleppo began to intrigue in order to stop Saladin's advance. There was the fear that the Sunnis would hand over the city to Saladin, and so a rapprochement was made with the Shiites in the city, for their influence was considerable – one recalls how they had strongly opposed Nur al-Din's construction of madrasas. Now once again the Shiite call to prayer was heard in Aleppo and the symbolism of that at a time when Saladin had extinguished it in Egypt was certainly not lost on him. In Aleppo, as in Mosul, the strict principles of the revived Sunnism which Nur al-Din had imposed were fast unravelling. But the Shiites were not the only party towards whom the Aleppans made advances; they also contacted the Franks and Raymond of Tripoli, who was naturally receptive to the Aleppan rapprochement. The result was that Saladin faced a mirror image of what had confronted Nur al-Din. Once, Nur al-Din had controlled northern Syria and Damascus and had struggled to control Egypt, now the situation

had reversed itself and Saladin controlled Egypt and Damascus but struggled to bring Aleppo and Mosul under his control. At the same time the situation had also reversed itself for the Franks, for they had endeavoured with great fortitude to prevent Egypt falling into the Sunni orbit. Now they had to come to the aid of Aleppo and Mosul and ensure that Saladin's policy of encirclement was thwarted.

Despite Shiite reconciliation and Frankish rapprochement, the Aleppans still feared Saladin and they decided to eliminate him once and for all. So a secret message was sent to Rashid al-Din Sinan, the legendary head of the Ismaili Assassins – one which was accompanied naturally by financial inducements and which asked for Saladin's head. By this time Saladin was encamped south of Aleppo. It was the custom to hold communal meals near his tent, where the amirs and distinguished visitors would drop by to sit with him for a few minutes. As it happened – and to Saladin's great fortune – Khumartekin, the lord of a nearby land, was in Saladin's company when he spotted a group of men approaching the tent. At once he recognised them as belonging to the Assassins and he raised the alarm. The Assassins rapidly attacked Saladin, who was surrounded by his amirs as others rushed to his aid. During the furious and bloody mêlée, one of the Assassins broke through the ranks and came face to face with Saladin, but as he raised his sword he was slain by one of the amirs. The Aleppans had come a sword-strike away from ridding themselves of their most feared foe. When the fight was over bodies were strewn among the tent, among them that of Khumartekin. Saladin himself was unhurt, but greatly shaken by the force of the attack. If he did not know it then, he now understood how dangerous his foray in Syria would be. Aleppo was clearly not going to open its gates as Damascus had done. At the same time, Saladin calculated that if the city did not fall easily then he could not afford to besiege it, as he would be open to an attack from the Franks or the Mosulis. He had a reason for being wary, for Gumushtekin of Aleppo had sent an urgent message to Raymond of Tripoli, who raised a force and moved on Homs, thereby endangering Saladin's line of supply. In addition, news reached Saladin that a relief army was approaching from Mosul and he had no choice but to lift the siege of Aleppo and hurry south to confront Raymond, who quickly retreated. For the time being the threat to Aleppo had been removed. In gratitude for the Frankish help, Aleppo released from their prison several Christian prisoners, among whom was Reynald of Chatillon, who would emerge as Saladin's

nemesis. It can be fairly said that it would have been better for the fate of the Latin Kingdom had he remained in a dungeon in Aleppo.

Emboldened by what they interpreted as a retreat, and strengthened by the relief force from Mosul, the Aleppans now marched out to confront Saladin. In fact the relief force which arrived from Mosul was headed not by Saif a-Din Ghazi but by a younger brother, Izz al-Din Masud, and the reason for that was that the two nephews of Nur al-Din, Saif a-Din Ghazi and Imad al-Din Zengi, had turned against each other. Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri had once warned Nur al-Din that the end of the house of the Zengids would be at their hands, and it seemed that his prophecy was coming true. What is perhaps less well known is that Saladin played a role in setting the two brothers against each other, so as to weaken them. He even sent some troops to help Imad al-Din Zengi[15] – proof, if any was needed, that Saladin could play the political game of chess as well as any of the other competitors. In the meantime, on 29 March, Baalbek, where he had grown up, fell peacefully to Saladin. Yet the news of the approaching army from Mosul was alarming. Saladin knew that Aleppo and Mosul had made an alliance with the Franks and he had written to the caliph complaining against this agreement. The Mosuli–Aleppan–Frankish alliance meant that Saladin could not fight the Aleppan forces without fear of Raymond attacking his lines of supply. It was an awkward situation, but then again Saladin had been in awkward situations before. Short of men, he wrote urgently to Egypt to send troops. At the same time, aware that he could not fight on two fronts, he entered into a truce with the Franks to protect his flank – a 'deplorable act' he was quick to label it – but he felt he had no choice, as the Aleppans and the Mosulis had forced his hand. In return for a guarantee that he would not be attacked, Saladin agreed to release some Frankish hostages. This truce strengthened Saladin's position in north Syria, while leaving many Franks perplexed and angered – none more so than William of Tyre, who bemoaned the truce which was:

> *done against our interests, for our favour was extended to a man who ought to have been resisted with vigour lest, having become more powerful, he should behave with greater insolence towards us; and so he dared to place his hopes in us, although all the time he was increasing his power at our expense.*

To a large extent, however, Raymond of Tripoli, who was acting as regent, had little option but to reach an agreement with Saladin, for signs of leprosy

were becoming distressingly clear in the young Baldwin IV and the priority was to find a husband for Baldwin's sister, Sybil, who could act as regent and in due course succeed him. But even with the truce Saladin was still outnumbered by the forces of Mosul and Aleppo. It was a vulnerable position to be in and the natural strategy would have been to retreat further south. Perhaps the younger Saladin would have done so, but the experience he had gained while vizier had emboldened him and he trusted his instincts and his men. And so he deliberately chose to remain in a vulnerable position and expose his army to an attack. The only conclusion that one draws from this was that Saladin wanted to be attacked so as to demonstrate to everyone, and especially to the Abbasid caliph, that he was the one aggressed upon and not the aggressor. As Lyons and Jackson conclude, Saladin was deliberately baiting a trap and had 'outmanoeuvred his enemies strategically and tactically so as to induce them to throw away their advantages by attacking him'.[16]

The battle itself took place at the Horns of Hama on 13 April – if it can be called a battle, since it was more of a rout. Saladin knew that the Aleppans were better at posturing than fighting and were certainly no match for his battle-hardened veterans. In his words, the enemy broke 'like glass', and on observing Izz al-Din Masud's military manoeuvring, he smiled to himself. 'He is either the bravest of men,' he commented wryly to his amirs, 'or else he knows nothing of war.' Careful instructions were given to his army to remain disciplined, for Saladin was aware that greater issues than a military victory were at stake. He hoped that one day his present enemies would serve under him and he needed to act accordingly. So he ordered that a line of flight be opened for the defeated Aleppans and gave strict instructions that they should not be pursued. In addition, no fugitives or wounded men were to be killed and any prisoners taken were to be released. Throughout, the impression is that Saladin was totally in control of the situation and the Aleppan defeat led to a treaty, which saw them break off their treaty with the Franks. In addition Saladin was ceded lands in Syria, al-Salih's name was retained in the coinage and Friday sermons in Saladin's domains, and the Aleppans agreed to supply men to fight the holy war. Izz al-Din Jurdik was also released and he entered Saladin's service. It was a favourable treaty for Saladin; he had firmly established his position in Syria and his diplomacy had won him allies, for his army had increased tenfold.[17] But he had failed to take Aleppo, where al-Salih remained, out of reach, and

he had not been able to establish the kind of authority which Nur al-Din had over Syria. He wrote at once to the caliph stressing his credentials for fighting the holy war and requesting a caliphal diploma of investiture to cover Syria, but he probably only did so as a show, for he knew the caliph would not take sides. Indeed he soon received robes of honour and a diploma of investiture covering only the lands he already had. And to prove that the caliph was not prepared to take sides, he sent similar robes to al-Salih in Aleppo.

Apart from Aleppo, Saladin effectively controlled Syria and, as he had done in Egypt, he now gathered his family around him. He restored Homs not to Fakhr al-Din al-Zafarani but to Shirkuh's son. This caused anger on Fakhr al-Din's part, who felt betrayed, and he departed from Saladin and moved into the Mosuli camp. However, it was not the last time the two men would meet. In many ways Saladin had no choice – he needed to rely on his family as they were the base of his support and the platform for the dynasty he wished to build, and they in return needed to be compensated. And so Saladin also handed Hama to his maternal uncle Shihab al-Din Harimi and appointed his nephew Taqi ul-Din as governor of Damascus, while Farrukh Shah returned to Egypt with the Egyptian troops. As for Saladin, he chose to return to Damascus, for he remained wary about Mosul's motives. And he had a right to be, for news reached him that Saif al-Din of Mosul had taken advantage of the absence of Saladin's Egyptian troops to enter into a secret agreement with Aleppo and to move his troops to Nisibin so as to threaten Hisn Kaifa and Mardin. Saladin immediately wrote to the caliph to point out that Saif al-Din's actions were breaking the treaty he had signed with Aleppo, but by the spring of 1176 Saif al-Din had crossed the Euphrates and had made direct contact with Aleppo. Negotiations had even commenced on how the spoils in Syria would be divided once Saladin had been driven back to Egypt. When news of these negotiations reached Saladin he set off at once from Damascus and by April 1176 was at Hama. The situation was dangerous and Saladin quickly required reinforcements. He appealed to Turan Shah, who had stood by him so decisively in Egypt, and who was in Yemen, to join him as soon as possible. Turan Shah arrived in Damascus by the end of April. In the meantime Saif al-Din had moved south of Aleppo and Saladin gathered his army to confront him. The battle was joined at Tell al-Sultan and Saif al-Din's army certainly outnumbered that of Saladin. Saif al-Din's left wing was commanded by Muzaffar al-Din

Keukburi, who that day fought against Saladin but who would become one of his most famous generals.

Once again the battle was a non-event as the Mosuli troops disintegrated. As before, Saladin was generous in triumph and allowed the scattered Mosulis to flee without pursuit, for he was eager to win them over to his cause and magnanimity in victory was no hardship. Of those who fled was Saif al-Din himself, who hurriedly abandoned his tent, which was found to contain an impressive aviary containing nightingales, pigeons and doves. When Saladin learned of this he ordered that the birds be returned to Saif al-Din, accompanied by a dismissive message: 'Tell him to stay at home and play with his birds and leave serious matters to others'. Within a month, however, Saladin would find out that Saif al-Din still possessed some venom, for on 22 May the Assassins struck again, when four of them succeeded in infiltrating Saladin's most trusted bodyguards and made an attempt on his life. One of them came so close that he struck Saladin with a knife, slashing his cheek before being slain. The other three were cut down immediately, but as Saladin, with blood pouring down his face, was escorted back to his tent, panic spread among the camp and strangers were seized. Henceforth Saladin refused to speak to anyone he did not know and asked those whom he did not recognise to be removed immediately from his presence, though not without dispatching a messenger after them to hear and fulfil their petition.

The situation in Syria was frustrating in the extreme: military victories had not translated into a satisfactory political solution. As long as Aleppo stubbornly resisted, Saladin knew he could not endure long sieges without tarnishing his reputation. To exacerbate the frustration, al-Qadi al-Fadil pleaded to return to Egypt, where the affairs of the country required his assistance. His absence was felt by Saladin, who relied on him considerably. Now in his place and as his deputy he recommended someone whose pedigree was impeccable and who had already served under two of the pillars of the Sunni Revival. Born in 1125 in Isfahan into a prestigious family, Imad al-Din al-Isfahani entered the Nizamiyya madrasa at a young age, where he remained studying and teaching jurisprudence for the next 15 years. In 1157, at the age of 32, he was sent to administer Wasit and Basra on behalf of the vizier Ibn Hubayra, who was on good terms with Nur al-Din. In 1167, two years after the vizier's death, he moved to Syria, where his connections served him well and he found employment with Nur al-Din. It was also during this period that he came into frequent contact with Shirkuh and Ayyub and began a lifelong friendship with Saladin. In fact it seems that Imad al-Din had known Saladin's father, Ayyub, from an earlier period, probably when he was serving under Ibn Hubayra. After Nur al-Din's death, Imad al-Din moved to Mosul, but when he heard that Saladin was marching on Damascus he rushed there. He was astute enough to understand that he needed to gain favour with al-Qadi al-Fadil, who was the key to acquiring a position of power under Saladin, and it seems that al-Fadil was impressed with him – in particular his command of Persian. Both men were avid readers of the spiritual architect of the Sunni Revival, al-Ghazali, and it was al-Qadi al-Fadil who commissioned Imad al-Din to translate al-Ghazali's *Alchemy of Happiness* from Persian into Arabic. We are told that it took him four months to complete this task. What is of great interest is that the man who introduced Imad al-Din to al-Fadil was none other than Ibn Masal who had, during the siege of Alexandria, become a close friend of Saladin. Al-Qadi al-Fadil would have also been impressed that Imad al-Din was familiar with the internal affairs of the Nur al-Din court and he seems to have helped him alleviate some financial problems and recommended that he be appointed to work in Saladin's chancellery.

Imad al-Din quickly established himself in the inner circles of Saladin's entourage. In the words of Richards, 'he belonged to that circle of intimates who stayed on after the emirs and officials had left the general audience. This gave privileged access to the sultan's ear.'[18] It appears that Saladin called on him day and night and to such an extent that Imad al-Din built himself a new house adjacent to the Damascus citadel so that he could be on call at any time; and it can be fairly said that he offered a 'genuinely insider viewpoint'.[19] Imad al-Din served both Nur al-Din and Saladin and he certainly admired them greatly; indeed his most important work, *al-Barq al-Shami* (The Syrian Lightning), which covers the period 1166–93 and which can be claimed to be Imad al-Din's memoirs, was written precisely because he feared that Saladin's name would be forgotten. In many ways it remains the best source for Saladin's life and one is struck by its impartiality towards the two men whom he served. Imad al-Din symbolised, even more than al-Qadi al-Fadil, the scholar/adminstrator ideal which was the aim of the madrasas. Not only had he studied and taught at the Nizamiyya in Baghdad, but he also served those in power. At the same time he maintained a strong attachment to religion and scholarship, which is partly reflected in his choice of a Sufi cemetery as his burial place. Certainly reading Imad

al-Din's work gives a glimpse into the world view of the clerical class and how distinct it was from the military one. At one point he asserts the power of his pen, equating it with Saladin's sword, and this is brought out in one remarkable occasion when he was asked to execute a prisoner of war but declined to do so, explaining that his calling was to the pen, not to the sword. It was an attachment which on occasion blinded his impartiality. We have to recall that the military class was composed largely of Kurds and Turks, while the clerical class were Arabs and Persians, and Imad al-Din, reflecting his clerical background, is sometimes dismissive. For example, he criticised Qaraqush, a leading member of Saladin's military circle and the defender of Acre, as a Turk who possessed no books, thereby betraying a sense of proportion which was corrected by Ibn Khallikan, who wrote that Saladin and Islam owed Qaraqush a considerable debt. Neverthless Imad al-Din retained an objectivity that was refreshing; none more so than when he mocked himself about how, on one occasion, he lost his nerve and withdrew from a military expedition. He was equally a realist who understood the realpolitik that drove both men on: 'the force of ambition and the strength of self-interest'.[20] He was also very good at reading between the lines – and how could he not be, when he spent his career couching diplomatic language to maximum effect? On one occasion when Saladin was away on campaign, Imad al-Din heard the public crier announce that the sultan had returned safely and immediately surmised that Saladin had been defeated, for few could 'spin' stories better than Imad al-Din al-Isfahani: 'They would not be giving good news of his safety', he noted, 'unless there had been a defeat'. It would be hard to overestimate how important both Imad al-Din and al-Qadi al-Fadil were to Saladin, for the two men turned his chancery into a major and highly effective instrument of propaganda.

The question that plagued Saladin was what was to be done with Aleppo. Clearly the Aleppans were unwilling to surrender, nor could the city be seized by force, for the risk of bloodshed was too great. And so the answer, frustratingly, was for the time being very little could be done. In the meantime Saladin turned his attention to Masyaf, which was the stronghold of the Assassins, for the time had come to reckon with them. What happened next is shrouded in mystery. Having laid a siege, Saladin suddenly broke it off and withdrew to Damascus. Why he acted thus has never been fully explained. According to some reports a message was sent to him that unless the siege was lifted his uncle Shihab al-Din Harimi and his family would be

slaughtered. Perhaps, but it does seem unlikely that Saladin would have succumbed to such threats since it was so out of character. What was more significant was that having withdrawn, Saladin was never again threatened by the Assassins; proof that some form of deal was cut. Upon returning to Damascus Saladin discovered that Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri had died and in his place, as qadi of Damascus, he appointed a Mosuli, Ibn Abi Asrun, of whom it was said that he never made a mistake or took a bribe.[21] Ibn Abi Asrun is of particular interest because he rose to great prominence under Saladin. It was he who, following the victory at Hattin, carried the captured True Cross, fixed upside down on a lance, into Damascus. But Ibn Abi Asrun is also of interest for another reason, for he represents another example of the influence of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani on those who surrounded and influenced Saladin. Born in Mosul, Ibn Abi Asrun had studied Shafii law in the city before travelling to Baghdad to study at the Nizamiyya. It was in that city he came across al-Jilani, whom he befriended.

While in Damascus Saladin married Ismat al-Din Khatun, who was Nur al-Din's widow. Although it was undoubtedly a political marriage, for she was already in her fifties, it was one that contained much love and tenderness. Years later when she passed away, Saladin was ill on campaign and it was felt best to withhold the news from him; so we are left with the image of him continuing to write letters to her. Leaving his brother Turan Shah as his deputy, Saladin then returned to Egypt in September 1176. In the very same month, and as he headed to Cairo, news reached him that the Seljuq sultan Kilij Arslan had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Byzantine forces at Myriokephalon. This in the fullness of time would signal a significant blow for the Franks of the Latin Kingdom, since despite the mutual mistrust the existence of the Byzantium army acted as a safeguard against the Muslims. Perhaps at first they did not fully realise what had occurred, but when William of Tyre visited Constantinople three years later and learnt what had happened, he realised the dangers ahead.[22] For Saladin, the news of Kilij Arslan's victory was received with mixed emotions; yes, a significant defeat had been inflicted on a Christian army, but there now existed a challenger to his claim of being the champion of the holy war. Indeed Kilij Arslan could claim – as he often did – that he was engaging the Christians at a time when Saladin had not only allowed himself to get bogged down fighting fellow Muslims, but had even gone as far as to make a truce with the Franks. It was a claim which Saladin found hard to shake off.

Chapter 8

The Meddlesome Priest: Saladin and al-Khabushani

We have no power over this shaykh, so satisfy him.

Saladin

Madrasa building in Egypt

In Egypt Saladin could forget his Syrian problems for a while and focus his efforts on introducing Sunni orthodoxy into the land of the Nile. Apart from the al-Nasiriyyah madrasa of which we have spoken earlier, we are certain that he built at least five madrasas in Egypt. Although as a Shafii he gave precedence to that madhab, there are no signs that he was interested in promoting it at the expense of the others. So at the same time that al-Nasiriyyah was being constructed, he ordered work on a Maliki madrasa. This, too, stood near the mosque of Amr, and was built on the site of a covered market. Saladin endowed the madrasa with the booksellers' market, which was located only a few minutes away, and with two villages in Fayyum, which provided wheat for the students there. Hence it became known as al-Qamihiyya. The revenue of the booksellers' market supported the professors and the students. Saladin also showed a personal interest in the Malikis, many of whom were originally from North Africa. The pilgrimage route from the Maghreb involved an arduous land journey until the pilgrims

reached Alexandria and, aware of this, Saladin decreed that all Maghribi travellers be entitled to a daily portion of bread, the expenditure for which was covered through a pious endowment. Upon reaching Cairo they were treated no less well than in Alexandria and the pilgrims could stay and study at the mosque of Ibn Tulun, while the costs of their sojourn were covered by the authorities. Nor did Saladin forget the followers of the Hanafi madhab, even though they were few in number in Egypt. In 1176 he founded a college for them in Cairo and once again the location was carefully selected for symbolic value, being the house of several Fatimid viziers. But this was not just any house, for its history was both well known and scandalous. It was there, so rumour went, that the caliph al-Zafir had had a homosexual liaison with the son of a Fatimid vizier, whose slain body was later left to rot on the gates of Bab Zuwaila. Saladin could not have chosen better; he was undoubtedly aware of the scandalous story and realised that the transformation of the house into a madrasa would dramatically signal a purification of the past. The madrasa was called al-Suyufiyya due to its proximity to the market of the sword sellers. The income for the madrasa was provided for by the endowment of 32 shops in the market of Amir al-Juyush.

This madrasa affords us an opportunity to throw light on some of the characters who were associated with Saladin, for several intriguing personalities were linked to the al-Suyufiyya. A glance at the signatories of the certificate authorising the madrasa reveals none other than Zein al-Din Ibn Naja, whom Saladin labelled as his Amr Ibn al-As for helping him restore Sunnism to Egypt. One wonders what the ascetic Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani would have made of his disciple, for it was common knowledge that Ibn Naja's supposed spiritual austerity did not prevent him from acquiring great wealth, which included 20 slave girls valued at 1,000 dinars each and a cuisine which was the envy of the city. The first professor of the al-Suyufiyya provides an example of how far scholars travelled in those days. Born in Khutan, now in Chinese Turkmenistan, Majd al-Din al-Khatuni studied hadith in Samarqand, Bukhara and Khurasan. His travels took him to Iraq and Syria, where he fought against the crusaders. He came to the attention of Nur al-Din, who appointed him as professor of the al-Sadriyya madrasa in Damascus, where he taught for a while before leaving to perform the pilgrimage, after which he headed for Egypt, where Saladin appointed him as head of the al-Suyufiyya. What occurred next goes to the heart of how potentially tempestuous the relationship could be between the rulers and

the scholars and how wary ulama were of being associated with those in power. While al-Khatuni was teaching at the madrasa he heard about some illegal taxes which apparently Saladin had not abrogated. At once the scrupulous al-Khatuni dropped everything, left the madrasa and departed for Spain. Whatever had irked al-Khatuni so much appeared to have resolved itself; perhaps Saladin acted accordingly, for al-Khatuni returned to the madrasa, where he remained until his death in 1190.

Equally intriguing was al-Bajali, the second professor of the madrasa. Born in Baghdad, he studied and lived in Damascus, where he came into close contact with Saladin and in particular with Shirkuh, over whom he had considerable influence. By all accounts he was a militant Sunni who had little time for the Shiites, and he was one of those who urged Shirkuh to march on Egypt and put an end to the Fatimids. After Saladin became vizier, al-Bajali joined him in Cairo. Without doubt the most prestigious of Saladin's madrasas was the al-Salihiyya and its location explains its importance: it was built near the tomb of Imam al-Shafii. As a Shafii Muslim, it was natural that Saladin should honour the founder of his madhab so grandly. For many years the tomb had been an object of pilgrimage, visited both by Sunnis and Shiites. How important the imam was to Egypt is borne out in an interesting anecdote. When Nizam ul-Mulk, who himself was a Shafii, built the Nizamiyya he wanted to have the remains of the imam brought to Baghdad and entombed within the walls of the madrasa. The Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamali, who was an Armenian Christian who had converted to Islam, was unconcerned about such matters and agreed to this request, but was forced to backtrack when attempts to exhume the remains of the imam were met with vociferous demonstrations from the Sunnis of Cairo who, it seems, were not prepared to allow the remains of their beloved imam to leave Egypt. Saladin would undoubtedly have been told of the incident involving Nizam ul-Mulk and he now saw an opportunity to mirror the actions of great Persian vizier by constructing a madrasa which incorporated the tomb of al-Shafii. No expense was spared, neither in its construction nor in the enormous salary which it paid its professor. It was truly unrivalled in Egypt. The traveller Ibn Jubayr was so impressed by the complex, which must have dominated the entire cemetery, that he likened it to a separate town.[1] The madrasa accommodated at least one hundred students who were resident there. What is equally noteworthy is that one of the few inscriptions to survive in Egypt is from the al-Salahiyya and is written in the cursive

script which Saladin had imported from Syria. Clear and legible, the letterings themselves were enough to announce that the new age of Sunnism had firmly arrived in Egypt. As for the content of the inscription, that too was of great interest, since it set a condition which prevailed in Saladin's madrasas, which was the teaching of Asharism. This was the Asharism which al-Ghazali had helped integrate within the fold of orthodox Islam, and in this way another of the main pillars of the Sunni Revival – Asharism – became the doctrine of Egypt.

If Ibn Zain al-Tujjar – the first professor of al-Nasiriyyah, the first madrasa which Saladin had constructed – can be fairly claimed to have been nondescript, then the same can certainly not be said about the first professor of the al-Salihiyya madrasa, a man who, if nothing else, proved that Saladin too had his meddlesome priest. How does one begin telling the story of the larger-than-life Najm al-Din al-Khabushani? What is certain is that the pedigree of his knowledge was impeccable, both as a scholar and a sufi. Born in Khabusan, in the province of Nishapur, he studied Shafii law with Muhammad Ibn Yahya, who was a student of al-Ghazali. He even wrote a 16-volume work, *Tahqiq al-Wasit*, which was a commentary on al-Ghazali's work. Al-Khabushani travelled to Damascus where he spent time in the same sufi khanaqah where al-Ghazali had resided, and where he apparently lived in poverty and practised mortification of the flesh.[2] It was while he was in Damascus that he first came into contact with Saladin's father and with Shirkuh. Outspoken against the Ismailis, whom he considered a dangerous heresy, he was vociferous in his pleas to Shirkuh to advance on Egypt, boasting that he himself would go and get rid of the Fatimid caliph. It was also during this period that al-Khabushani first met Saladin.

Six months after Saladin's appointment as vizier, al-Khabushani arrived in Egypt and his garrulous and confrontational character meant that it would not be long before his presence was felt. Outspoken against the Fatimids in Damascus, he was certainly not prepared to hold his tongue in Cairo, even if matters of tact dictated it, for this was still the period when the diplomatic charade meant that Saladin was serving the Fatimid caliph as his vizier. Having deliberately chosen a mosque not far from the Fatimid palace to live in, al-Khabushani wasted no time in publicly denouncing Ismailism. Clearly the withdrawn and contemplative path to knowledge, made famous by al-Ghazali, was not the one al-Khabushani was prepared to take. Here was an ascetic with an attitude. Before long his public denunciations were so

effective that they reached the ears of those at the Fatimid palace, and an attempt to quieten him was made. Perhaps a gift would silence this noisy preacher, so a messenger was sent with 4,000 dinars, a sum large enough to render most preachers contemplative. But the messenger had not accounted for al-Khabushani's hatred of heresy, nor had he expected to confront a short-tempered scholar. On seeing the man, al-Khabushani exploded with anger and struck him on the head, unravelling his turban. He then sent the man scurrying down the stairs while throwing the dinars at his head, all accompanied by curses that no man of God should know. Another story is also told of him and the Fatimids. The caliph al-Adid had a dream in which he saw a scorpion emerge from a mosque to bite him. When he awoke he was alarmed by this and asked that the inhabitant of this mosque be brought to him. The man was, of course, al-Khabushani. In reality it is extremely unlikely that the Fatimid caliph would have ever crossed paths with al-Khabushani but one wonders if the latter would have held his tongue. But what was certainly not apocryphal was that when Saladin finally resolved to arrest al-Adid and officially abolish the Fatimid caliphate, he turned to his jurists to give him their legal opinions. The jurists agreed that it was legally permissible to kill the caliph, and the most adamant in this insistence was al-Khabushani.

Clearly this scholar's fury and tongue-lashing spared no one. Not even Saladin. On one occasion, when the sultan was preparing to leave for a campaign against the Franks, al-Khabushani went to bid him farewell. At the same time he took the opportunity to ask him to repeal some improper taxes from the people, which he declared were un-Islamic. Saladin, however, preoccupied with the forthcoming campaign, refused to do so, at which point and to the bewilderment of everyone present, al-Khabushani burst into a rage and railed at the sultan: 'May God then not grant you victory!' Astonishing as such an incident as this was, what was to follow was even more shocking. Advancing on Saladin, he raised his cane and struck him, knocking his headgear to the ground. Clearly al-Khabushani who, one recalls, knew Saladin and his father from his days in Damascus, felt that he could act in such an outrageous manner. Saladin, we are told, was left speechless. But that was not the end of the story. The campaign went badly for Saladin, and upon his return he went to see al-Khabushani and kissed his hand and asked for forgiveness. Such a public display of remorse appears astonishing. Did Saladin truly believe that his military setback was due to the withdrawal of al-Khabushani's blessing? Or was such a public display a

calculated attempt aimed at identifying himself with a holy man – given the great reverence in which such men were held in popular Islam? The whole incident is so astonishing that it is impossible to come to a conclusion. Clearly Saladin held al-Khabushani in considerable respect, although he was by no means a great teacher – he certainly was not in the calibre of Ibn Awf or al-Silafi – but we simply don't know why Saladin gave him such leeway. The only comment we have from Saladin is related to another incident, when al-Khabushani complained to Saladin about Taqi ul-Din, saying that he owned several places where beer was sold and that he should stop at once. Saladin must have sighed when he received the letter, saying as he passed it on to his nephew, 'We have no power over this shaykh, so satisfy him'.

What is noteworthy about al-Khabushani is that, despite his confrontational manner, he advocated a strict adherence to Islamic law; after all, the incident with Saladin occurred because Saladin was unwilling to repeal taxes that were illegal. Whereas al-Khatuni had chosen to leave his madrasa quietly and travel to Spain – where he grew dates which he gave to the poor – until Saladin corrected his error and induced him to return, al-Khabushani chose a more confrontational stance. By all accounts Saladin was a mild-mannered man and one imagines that had al-Khabushani acted thus with Shirkuh then that would have been the last we would have heard of this pugnacious character. But the issue is a deeper one; Saladin never interfered in the religious affairs of the ulama since he believed that the scholars of the religious sciences, especially jurisprudence and the Prophetic traditions, were guardians of an organic body of knowledge, the transmission of which in itself defined the legitimacy of kings.[3] Al-Khabushani's actions were not dissimilar to those of the Hanbalis who, in a previous generation, had so irked Nizam ul-Mulk. In a sense al-Khabushani represented the raw forces of ideological purity of the Sunni Revival, which meant that not only did heresy have to be rooted out, but that non-Muslims had to be kept in their place. We are told that Christians and Jews feared al-Khabushani and avoided him as much as they could, since nothing angered him more than a non-Muslim on horseback.[4]

The relationship between Saladin and the ulama

Generally the rulers or founders of madrasas were extremely careful not to meddle in religious matters. They knew very little about theological

intricacies and legal controversies, and steered well clear of any interference in the dogma. Theological squabbling was largely left to the ulama, and the rulers only interfered if they felt that things were getting out of control and there was a threat to public order. There was no question of Saladin seeking to change the law or to alter the doctrine. In any case the ulama would never have accepted such a trespass. But what the ruler could do was to ensure – through the founding of madrasas – that his vision for the madrasa was imposed. As long as he did not contravene the tenets of Islam, the founder had a free will to dictate his terms, since the property he dedicated was his own.[5] Madrasas were charitable institutions, established through endowments (waqfs), and the founder could use the waqf to dictate who could teach and what could be taught.[6] Qutb al-Din Muhammad, a descendant of Zengi, for example was such an ardent Hanafi with a dislike for Shafiis that when he constructed a madrasa in Sinjar he stipulated that not only was Hanafi law to be taught there for Hanafi students, but that everyone who worked there, including the doorman and the janitor, had to be a Hanafi.[7] Perhaps not the ecumenical policy of which Nizam ul-Mulk or Nur al-Din would have approved, but nevertheless a legitimate enough demand.

Saladin's great respect for the ulama was because they upheld the Sacred Law, which was the Sharia. For Saladin this was the law that held together the Muslim community and which needed to be preserved above all. Saladin understood that he could not interpret the law – that was the task of the ulama – but, as a ruler, he could implement it, and this was a task which he took very seriously. Each Monday and Thursday Saladin would sit to dispense justice in public session. Attended by the jurists, who offered advice, he would order the doors to be open to any litigant so that anyone could have access to petition him. On one occasion – some time after 1188, since that is when he entered his service – Ibn Shaddad was approached by a man holding a court document in his hand. When Ibn Shaddad asked him, 'Who is your opponent?', he replied, 'My opponent is Saladin'. The man then proceeded to explain that he owned a slave who held a large sum of money and when he died Saladin had seized this money, which the man claimed legally belonged to him. Ibn Shaddad was astonished by this claim and asked to inspect the document, which had been issued in Damascus. The man produced it and it certainly appeared genuine. 'I will speak to the sultan', Ibn Shaddad told the man. When he mentioned the subject to Saladin, he too appeared bemused by the claim, and declared that it

sounded highly unlikely. Ibn Shaddad then, not without embarrassment, informed Saladin that the man was insisting that he have his day in court. 'Very well', Saladin replied, 'we shall summon the man and go to law with him, doing in the case whatever the Holy Law requires.' When the day arrived and the man arrived at the court, Saladin came down from the chair he was seated on and sat next to him, so that they were equal. 'If you have a claim, then speak out', he ordered him. And the man related the events as he had done previously to Ibn Shaddad, who was also present. But when the man mentioned the date on which Saladin had seized the slave's money, Saladin interjected and stated that on such a date he was in Egypt, and then produced witnesses to testify to that. Ibn Shaddad understood what was happening and whispered to Saladin that the man had done all this in the hope that he would receive some money from him, and that it was probably best that he did not leave disappointed. 'That is a different matter', Saladin replied. The case dismissed, the man departed with a robe of honour. One is as struck by how respectful Saladin was to the procedure of the law, as by his lack of anger when it emerged that the case was fraudulent.

One further anecdote about al-Khabushani concerns Saladin's nephew Taqi ul-Din. To clear the air with him over the matter of whether he sold beer in his shops, Saladin's nephew rode out to the madrasa, where he was greeted by the doorman who told him to wait outside while he went in to inform al-Khabushani. 'Taqi ul-Din sends his greetings' the doorman announced, to which al-Khabushani replied with a pun 'Not Taqi ul Din but Shaqi al-Din' (not he who obeys religion but he who burdens it). The doorman then told him that Taqi ul-Din insisted that he had no places which sold beer, to which al-Khabushani replied that he was lying. Aware that al-Khabushani was keeping his illustrious guest waiting, the doorman then hastily rejoined, 'If he is lying, then show us where the beer is being sold'. Al-Khabushani asked him to come close since he claimed he had not heard him, but when the doorman approached him he seized him by the hair and started slapping him, 'Do I look like beer-seller to you? How would I know where beer is sold?' He then kicked him out and a ruffled doorman emerged to Taqi ul-Din. 'By God', he told him, 'I nearly sacrificed myself for you in there.'

Al-Khabushani dominated the al-Salihiyya madrasa not through the brilliance and depth of his teachings but through a forceful personality, which made him few friends and even fewer admirers. Even al-Qadi al-Fadil was at

the end of his sharp tongue. We are told that al-Qadi al-Fadil went to visit the madrasa, where he found al-Khabushani teaching a lesson, seated on a small chair on one side of imam al-Shafii's tomb. Al-Qadi al-Fadil decided to sit down beside him, but no sooner had he done this than al-Khabushani shouted at him, 'Get up! Get up! Your back is to the imam.' Al-Qadi al-Fadil replied that if his back was to the imam, his heart was not, but this response drew an even shriller response, until al-Qadi al-Fadil, puzzled by this eccentric behaviour, got up and left. However no act was more provocative than al-Khabushani's exhumation of al-Kizani's body. Al-Kizani was the Hanbali sufi and poet who, with Ibn Marzuq, was instrumental in helping Shirkuh during his first campaign to Egypt. He had met Saladin and had impressed him with his poetry. We know that he died around 1165 and was buried next to al-Shafii. A few years later al-Khabushani appeared in Egypt. When the work on the madrasa began, al-Khabushani ordered that al-Kizani's bones be dug up and scattered, claiming that his teachings had introduced innovations and that he did not deserve to be buried near the imam. In al Khabushani's words, a siddiq (a righteous man, referring to al-Shafii) should not be buried with a zindiq (an unbeliever, referring to al-Kizani). Al-Khabushani was of course referring to the dispute between the Hanbalis and the Shafii Asharis, which had predominated in the east, and it seems that he was bringing the theological argument to Egypt. This was a shocking act by any standards and there are signs that by then Saladin was tiring of the tirades of this obstinate shaykh. According to Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, Saladin met with Zahir al-Din al-Farisi, who was a renowned scholar from Isfahan and who had studied with the well-known theologian and philosopher Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. The scholar clearly impressed Saladin, and to persuade him to remain in Egypt Saladin offered him the position of the head of al-Salihiyya. Al-Farisi however turned the offer down and returned to Syria. Saladin, it seemed, was stuck with al-Khabushani. Perhaps significantly when al-Khabushani died in 1191 Saladin appointed in his place Sadr al-Din al-Juwaini, a man who was married to Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri's daughter. Qutb al-Din was of course Saladin's shaykh when he was young, and Sadr al-Din's mild manner would have been a source of relief after the tempest that was al-Khabushani.

Saladin built many other madrasas but there are very few historical records about them and we have to assume that they were less important than the ones mentioned above. There is certainly evidence of a madrasa in Alexandria built at the tomb of his brother Turan Shah, and Ibn Khallikan writes that Saladin built two madrasas in Damascus, although again it is not certain. Saladin also it seems built a madrasa in Medina, opposite the tomb of the Prophet, where the remains of his father and Shirkuh were transferred and interred. At the same time as the building of madrasas, Saladin appointed professors to a number of places in Cairo, such as the tomb of al-Husayn, the mosque of Amr and the al-Aqmar mosque. This was a quick and inexpensive way of speeding up the Sunnification of Egypt. The al-Aqmar mosque, for example, was located in the heartland of what was the Fatimid centre of power, between the Western and Eastern palaces. By appointing a permanent Shafii muddarris (professor) to it, he transformed it from a Shiite mosque into a Sunni one. Saladin's support for sufism was best exemplified by his construction of the Said al-Suada hospice for sufis in Cairo. Although these hospices were not madrasas – they included no organised or endowed classes – distinctions between the two institutions were quick to break down, and locations existed where sufi and student not only functioned side by side, but were in fact one and the same.[8] The term shaykh, of course, referred to both teacher and sufi teacher.

It is noteworthy that Saladin chose to neglect Upper Egypt completely, and no madrasas were built there. This brings us back to an important point; if the aim of madrasas was to combat Shiism then the absence of madrasas in the south appears peculiar. After all, many Fatimid supporters had fled there and one would have expected to have seen a dynamic programme of madrasa building all the way to Nubia. Even more peculiar was that in the heartbeat of the Fatimid empire, the city of Cairo, Saladin only chose to construct one madrasa. Again, if he was so concerned with Shiism, why this apparent neglect? The fact was that the Ismailis posed a negligible threat for Saladin and madrasas were more concerned to produce Sunni jurists.

One striking fact about the four main madrasas discussed above was that at least 17 of the 28 professors came from abroad.[9] Although there were very few Hanafis in Egypt, which meant that the professors for this madrasa had to be imported, that was not the case with the Shafiis; Egypt was full of Shafiis, even before Saladin's assumption of power. Despite this, Saladin chose to call upon those whom he knew and trusted from Syria, as he had little confidence in the Egyptian Sunni population, who had been affected by the 200 years of Shiite rule. In addition, during this period the majority of professors held non-academic posts in the government,[10] which effectively

meant that they were closely linked to the ruling elite. We have already seen signs of this rapprochement in the east and in particular under Nur al-Din in Syria, where Kamal al-Din al-Shahrazuri combined the positions of mud-daris, qadi and vizier. In Egypt, however, Saladin was confronted with a particular problem, which was that there was a shortage of Egyptian Sunnis who were madrasa-trained and capable of working in an administrative capacity. This meant that in the short term Sunni jurists who could also administer had to be imported from the East. From the very beginning there were close ties between the professors in Egypt and the Nizamiyya madrasas, especially the one in Baghdad, and no more direct a link can be found between Nizam ul-Mulk and Saladin than the fact that the latter stamped the intellectual world of Egypt with the Nizamiyya imprint. The shadow of the Nizamiyya madrasas loomed large over Egypt: a significant number of the Shafii professors who arrived in Egypt had studied at the madrasa in Baghdad, and much of their training and world view was accordingly coloured by the Nizamiyya viewpoint. Almost all these men were not Egyptian and the conclusion is that the model for the Egyptian madrasas – and hence the Sunni Revival – needs to be found not in Cairo but in Baghdad. The ideological struggle between Sunni Baghdad and Ismaili Cairo was finally over, and Saladin had fulfilled Nizam ul-Mulk's vision.

Saladin was of course not the only person who built madrasas in Egypt. His nephew, Taqi ul-Din, built the Manazil al-Izz madrasa which had previously been a luxurious palace where the Fatimid caliph went for relaxation. But Saladin's nephew was not without his head-strong scholar, and if Saladin had al-Khabushani to contend with, then Taqi ul-Din had Shihab al-Din Tusi. Born in Tus in 1128, he had studied in Isfahan and at the Nizamiyya in Baghdad. On arriving in Egypt he came to the attention of Taqi ul-Din, who appointed him as head of the new madrasa. A militant Sunni – and not without conceit – he was clearly a confrontational character. He was also virulently anti-Christian, reflecting the militant face of the emerging Sunni movement. On one occasion he forbade an Armenian bishop from taking over two churches, despite the fact that the bishop had obtained permission from none other than Saladin; and on another he chastised publicly a Christian who had spoken out against Islam, even though that had occurred 28 years earlier. No matter his confrontational nature, al-Tusi must have remained close to the ruling family, for on his death, in 1200, Saladin's sons carried his bier to the cemetery.

Several amirs in Saladin's service also build madrasas. Saif al-Din Yazkuj, originally a military slave of Shirkuh and later one of the amirs of Saladin and a man who had Saladin's complete confidence,[11] established two colleges, one in Fustat and one in Cairo. His wife also founded a law college. Masrur, a former Fatimid eunuch and the commander of Saladin's bodyguard, was another who built a madrasa, as did Husam al-Din Lu'Lu, the admiral of Saladin's navy, who was renowned for his piety and generosity. What motivated those amirs, as well as others, was a combination of factors: a mixture of military career, piety, charity and concern for personal salvation.[12] On occasion, however, piety was not complemented by virtue, as was in the case of Ibn Shukr, who became vizier under Saladin's brother al-Adil and who founded the al-Sahibiyya madrasa. Ibn Shukr was known for his rapacity and cruelty; on one occasion he fell seriously ill with dysentery and his doctors despaired that he would recover. While in acute agony he called for ten shaykhs whom he had imprisoned and then tortured in his presence, so that their groans mixed with his and he found comfort in their discomfort.

The construction of madrasas continued at a remarkable pace, both in Egypt and Syria. By the death of Saladin in 1193 there were 30 madrasas in Damascus. By 1250, 160 new religious and charitable institutions were founded in Ayyubid Damascus, representing a remarkable spurt of building growth at an average of just under two buildings every year. Of those 160 buildings, 63 were madrasas and 29 sufi hospices.[13] By the middle of the thirteenth century Cairo and Fustat boasted between them 32 madrasas. In fact this number is conservative in the extreme, since madrasas could exist wherever a professor taught. As Berkey emphasises, an open space – the floor of a mosque, a sufi cell, a private living room – offered a suitable site for a madrasa.[14] The question of who was behind this remarkable growth in construction reveals a fascinating and surprising answer: nearly one half of the patrons from the Ayyubid house were women.[15] It does seem that Saladin's legacy of madrasa buildings was carried on not by the men but the women members of his dynasty, who had a significant voice in defining the character of Islam.[16] Khutlu-Khayr, who was the wife of Saladin's eldest brother Shahanshah, endowed a madrasa on the Upper Sharaf, west of the walled city of Damascus, as an act of piety,[17] as did her daughter Adhra Khatun, who founded two institutions, the madrasa al-Adhrawiyya (for both Hanafis and Shafiis) and a sufi convent just inside the city walls. Ismat al-Din Khatun, who had married both Nur al-Din and Saladin, also left a

mark on the city, founding a Hanafi madrasa and a sufi hospice. Mention should also be made of two of Saladin's sisters: Rabia Khatun, who endowed a Hanbali madrasa in Damascus, almost certainly as a result of her marriage to one of Saladin's most important generals, Muzaffar al-Din Keukburi, who was a Hanbali; and Sitt al-Sham Zumurrud, who endowed two madrasas. These madrasas were associated with acts of piety – and one cannot underestimate the role that personal piety and the desire for salvation played in the commissioning of madrasas. Indeed, the emphasis on the 'political' purpose of madrasas has often tended to overlook the element of personal piety and the desire, in the words of Makdisi, to draw 'near to God, the desire to perform good works and to leave a legacy of such good works pleasing in the eyes of God'.[18]

The Sunnification of Egypt

But if the pietistic element needs to be acknowledged then so does the political potential inherent in the madrasa. Perhaps no one understood this more clearly than al-Qadi al-Fadil, since to a large extent he was the key to the Sunni transformation which took place in Egypt under Saladin. He was certainly the final authority in the administration and financing of religious endowments.[19] As a man of considerable experience in administration, he understood with a piercing clarity what was required, and this was reflected in the madrasa which he founded in Cairo in 1184. Open to Malikis and Shafiis, his intention was to emphasise a certain unity of purpose in strengthening the link between the government and orthodoxy. This madrasa became associated with the fame of al-Qasim Ibn Firruh al-Shatibi, who taught and recited Quran there and whose classes were so popular that students had to scramble to get a seat. The madrasa became one of the most prominent in Egypt, mainly thanks to its library, which was the largest in the country and which contained the Quran that belonged to the third caliph after the Prophet, Uthman. Al-Qadi al-Fadil himself was a remarkably literary man and when Saladin closed the Fatimid Dar al-Hikma and sold its books, he purchased many of them. An anecdote also demonstrates the depth of his learning. We are told that a friend approached him with a request: his son wanted to read a certain book on poetry and the father was not sure if he was old enough. What did he advise? Al-Qadi al-Fadil called his servant to bring him a copy. The servant arrived carrying 35

copies, all written by different scribes. Al-Qadi al-Fadil opened each copy and immediately recognised the hand of the particular scribe. Finally he advised his friend that the book was not suitable for boys. Al-Qadi al-Fadil's aim was simple; in the words of Leiser it was to produce an 'army of graduates'[20] who would fill positions in the Muslim religious hierarchy. Although referring in particular to the Mamluk period, Leiser captures al-Qadi al-Fadil's vision when he attributes a military tone to the madrasas, and writes of the army and the madrasa acting as a vice that began to squeeze the Christians in Syria and Egypt. In addition the fact that a person could serve in more than one capacity at the same time, for example a professor in a college and secretary in a ministry, helped make the grip of the vice unbreakable.[21]

Saladin was certain that the threat to Islam came not from the Shiites but from the Christians, and this is reflected in the fact that he carried out no retaliatory actions against the Ismailis, but instead turned his attention towards the Christians. Under his rule he ensured that they never again enjoyed the relative influence that they had previously. Listening to advice from al-Qadi al-Fadil, who warned against employing Christians in any branch of the administration, he dismissed them from holding any positions as overseers of the treasuries or as inspectors. Then he ordered that wooden crosses be removed from the tops of all churches and banned the ringing of church bells, as well as the Palm Sunday processions. Christians were also forbidden to ride horses or mules. Conversions from Coptic Christianity to Islam increased during this period and this was almost certainly due to the fact that Christians were being excluded from government positions. The example of Ibn Mammati, who was initially secretary of the ministry of the army and whom Saladin eventually promoted to secretary in charge of all ministries, is a good one. His father, al-Muhadhdhab, had converted from Christianity to Islam to further his career, and his son flourished under the Ayyubids. Whether the conversions during this period were purely cosmetic is hard to say, though it should be noted that Ibn Mammati studied under al-Silafi. Once again this could have been for purely practical reasons; a knowledge of law was necessary for appointment in the ministries.

The purge of the civil administration was down almost solely to al-Qadi al-Fadil, who played a key role in selecting and recommending members of the civilian elite to serve the new powers in the land. Indeed a recommendation from him was always important in opening the way for former

Fatimid administrators to the service of Saladin.[22] Al-Athir-Ibn Bunan, for example, who had previously served as the head of the office of inspection for the Fatimids, was handpicked by al-Qadi al-Fadil and accepted into Saladin's service, where he served as inspector in Alexandria. Another example is Fakhr al-Dawla al-Aswani, who was the stepson of Rashid Ibn al-Zubayr, who had openly supported Saladin during the siege of Alexandria and whom Shawar had subsequently put to death. It is interesting how often the city of Alexandria crops up in the details of those who served Saladin, though given its history that is not surprising. Al-Qadi al-Fadil had warned Saladin about the number of Christians and Jews in government and had strongly advised him not to appoint any to important positions. He himself purged from the different diwans a number of administrators and secretaries whom he considered dangerous to Saladin's regime, men whose pens, he described, 'were as sharp as thorns'. Al Maqrizi writes that al-Qadi al-Fadil purged almost all the Jews and Copts in the central administration.

Even though the madrasa was not originally intended to promote Islam at the expense of non-Muslims, the role that it came to play contributed to that very purpose. In the wake of the Crusades, the madrasas produced a self-consciously traditionalist and militant Sunni identity.[23] This process of Sunnification is crucial to understand the bigger picture. Within 200 years of Saladin's death virtually all the key positions in government were filled by Muslims who had studied in madrasas. Within this period Muslims competed with Christians in positions which had traditionally been monopolised by Christians: secretaries, accountants and controllers.[24] Gradually the sheer number of madrasa-trained Muslims overwhelmed the Christians and, in that sense, the madrasa proved to be the principal institution that was responsible for undermining the Christian domination of the government.[25] But it was not simply among the jurists and administrators that the madrasas impacted most. Rather, its roots affected the lives of the ordinary Muslims on a daily basis, as madrasas offered the ulama a platform to provide direct and immediate legal and religious guidance to the Muslim community. Phrases such as 'he informed the people' ('afada al-nas'), or the 'people derived benefit from him' ('intafaa al nas bihi'), appear frequently in the biographies of ulama during this period.[26] The presence of professional legal advisers also meant that Muslims now had a ready access to Islamic law on a one-to-one basis to help them deal with their daily problems. In that, the

fatwa (legal opinion) played a crucial role. We read that the nephew of Ibn Asakir would sit in the Great Mosque in Damascus twice a week where he issued fatwas, for which requests came to him from around the Islamic world.[27] The main difference between the ulama before the establishment of madrasas and after was that the part-time legal scholars of the seventh to eleventh centuries had taught and given legal advice on an occasional basis. Their aim was primarily on pursuing their studies and self improvement. The professional ulama of the twelfth century, however, accentuated the dissemination of religious and legal instruction to the community. The madrasas allowed professional scholars to bring Islamic law and hadith directly to the community and to interact with them on a one-to-one basis, resulting in an increased religious awareness and participation by the community.[28] One piece of data bears this out: according to Ibn Asakir, who died in 1176, there were 420 mosques in Damascus and its suburbs. A few years later Ibn Shaddad, who died in 1234, listed 649 mosques in the same area. A rough calculation reveals that about four mosques a year were being constructed during this period.

The madrasas also performed other functions that were important for the unity, strength and fusion of Sunni Islam. One of them was as a hostel for travellers. This had quite far-reaching social implications as it meant that many merchants, and non-scholars, now took advantage of the free teaching and legal opinions offered by the madrasas. Sometimes they went for practical matters, for example to get an answer on a legal question relating to a business deal, but more often than not it was with the purpose of pursuit of knowledge and personal piety. Other social functions organically grew around the presence of the madrasas: colleges seem to have been the ideal places to conclude marriages, and it appears that this became a permanent function for madrasas. Such social functions could not help but reinforce the madrasa as a centre of community activity. Leiser writes that the madrasa offered the chance for any Sunni Muslim, no matter how poor and from any ethnic or linguistic background, to receive a higher education. There was never any discrimination or restriction based on wealth, origin or language. Madrasas were open to all, so that a farmer's son from a remote village in Upper Egypt had a chance to go to Cairo, Baghdad or any college and be trained as a judge or government official.[29] This brought Muslims closer together, kept them abreast of theological and political problems and contributed to the ijma (consensus) regarding the basic principles of Islam.

In short, the role of the madrasa should not be underestimated in creating the very concept of the 'Muslim world'.[30]

From Baghdad to Syria and from Syria to Egypt the madrasas spread rapidly across the Islamic world and their standardised curriculum (admittedly a loose one) allowed them to foster an *esprit de corps* among the ulama which existed independently of local political conditions. Of such things Nizam ul-Mulk could hardly have dreamed, but there is no doubt that he was the architect of an institution whose impact was profound in a way that was totally unexpected. The madrasas created an intellectual homogeneity and it was this homogeneity which was the platform on which Saladin realised his greatest achievements. In the words of Wiet, the madrasa 'formed the minds of those who later substantially contributed to the resistance to Crusader and Mongol alike. It may be justifiably claimed that, politically, the madrasa saved Islam.'[31]

Chapter 9

Saladin and the Leper King

Suddenly the Franks appeared, squadrons of them surging to the attack, nimble as wolves, barking like dogs, a mass of knights on fire for the battle.
Imad al-Din al-Isfahani

Baldwin IV and the Kingdom of Jerusalem

In July 1176 Baldwin IV came of age and the regency of Raymond of Tripoli ended. The peace treaty made by Raymond with Saladin in 1175 was not ratified by Baldwin and this reflected the growing influence of the hawks around the young king, men such as Joscelin of Edessa and Reynald of Chatillon. Joscelin was the brother of Agnes of Courtenay, who had been the wife of Amalric and the mother of Baldwin IV, and he therefore felt that he could exert considerable influence over his nephew. In 1164 he had been taken captive by Nur al-Din at the battle of Harim, where he remained a prisoner until 1176, when Agnes paid his ransom of 50,000 dinars. As for Reynald, his origins were obscure, though he was probably the son of Henri of Châtillon, Lord of Châtillon-sur-Loing. As a member of the minor nobility his story was a familiar one; with no inheritance in Europe, he travelled to the Holy Land motivated not by religious zeal – a virtue which seems to have been totally absent in his character – but by the desire to make a fortune. Upon his arrival in the East he entered the service of Constance of Antioch, whom he married in secret. The marriage was frowned upon by

Constance's cousin, Baldwin III, because of Reynald's lowly birth. Rapidly Reynald made his mark; when the Latin patriarch of Antioch refused to finance an expedition against Cyprus, Reynald had the patriarch seized, stripped naked, covered in honey, and left in the burning sun on top of the citadel. In 1160 Reynald was captured by the Muslims during a plundering raid and was confined at Aleppo for the next 17 years, until he was released as part of the truce signed by Saladin and Raymond of Tripoli. The two men – Joscelin and Reynald – shared a hostility toward Raymond who, they argued, had weakened the kingdom. There had been a time – in the wake of Nur al-Din's death – when Saladin's position was unstable and it still seemed possible, perhaps not to defeat him, but at least to prevent an Islamic encirclement. But by 1176 the Frankish room for manoeuvre had been much diminished and Joscelin and Reynald were convinced that this was largely due to Raymond's conduct in foreign affairs while he was regent.[1] Further truces would simply aid Saladin as he slowly strengthened his grip on Syria. A more aggressive policy needed to be adopted to try to break him urgently before it was too late. The key remained Egypt, which the Franks recognised as the hub of Saladin's power,[2] so in pursuance of his father's policy Baldwin planned a full-scale attack. Indeed one of Baldwin's first acts was to renew the grant of land in Egypt to the Knights of St John and promise their master Jobert an additional 30,000 bezants of revenue for his support. Any assault on Egypt naturally required naval support, and for that Baldwin turned to the Byzantines. He dispatched Reynald to Constantinople, where it was agreed on a joint attack. In return the Byzantine protectorate over the Latin Kingdom would be recognised and the orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem would be restored. The emperor Manuel was particularly receptive to the Franks' approach, as he sought to avenge the calamitous defeat at the hands of Kilij Arslan at Miriokephalon, a battle in which Reynald's son had been among those killed. In addition, part of Manuel's interest in Egypt was his desire to prevent the Sicilians gaining a foothold there and so controlling the Egyptian ports – and thereby offering attractive terms to Italian merchants.

It was during this period that the appeals of the Franks to Western Europe appeared to have produced a result, with the arrival of Philip of Flanders to the Holy Land. The son of Count Thierry and Sybilla of Anjou, Philip came from an excellent crusading pedigree, for his father had gone on four crusades and his mother was the daughter of King Fulk of

Jerusalem. So it was natural that hopes were raised that the arrival of Philip would lead to a new burst of campaigning. The reception that Philip received must have surprised him; he had set out on crusade in the expectation of undertaking some military operation which would make the Christian position more secure and increase his own prestige. Instead, he found himself greeted as the solution to the kingdom's problems.[3] Despite his illness, Baldwin, carried in a litter, travelled to greet his cousin and offered Philip the regency. Philip, however, turned down the offer, as the situation in Flanders did not allow him to absent himself for a lengthy time. He then made it clear that he was prepared to lead an attack on Egypt, but was not prepared to take the blame if it went wrong or, in the case of a successful campaign, to hand over the conquests to Jerusalem and Byzantium before returning home.[4] Searching for excuses for not joining the campaign, he first argued that the autumn season made the Nile floods a perilous time to invade Egypt, then declared his intention to join in any campaign elsewhere, though clearly the Byzantine fleet was redundant anywhere else. Philip's prevarication put the Franks in an awkward position, since they felt obliged to honour the agreement with Constantinople. Yet when they declared their intention to embark on the campaign without Philip, he refused to accept this since it would be a taint on his honour to remain in Jerusalem in winter while the army attacked Egypt. He himself only had a small army and he needed support from the local Franks to engage in any campaign. The problem was that if any of those local Franks participated with him, they would have been unable to join in the Egypt expedition. With frustration mounting on both sides, the Byzantines broke off negotiations and returned to Constantinople while the sea-lanes were still open before winter set in. When pressed for the purpose of his visit, Philip finally admitted that it was not war that was on his mind but marriage; to be precise the marriage of his two cousins, for whom he sought suitable suitors. This admission provoked an angry reaction: 'We thought you had come to fight for the Cross' cried Baldwin of Ibelin. 'Instead you talk of marriages.'

Eventually, in late summer 1177 when the opportunity to attack Egypt had passed, Philip departed to campaign in northern Syria and marched with Raymond on the city of Hama. The delays had paralysed any attack on Egypt and the Franks failed to seize the best opportunity they were ever to have of breaking Saladin's power.[5] Although success was by no means

guaranteed, there is no doubt that the combination of the Byzantine fleet, the crusader states and Philip of Flanders' army would have caused Saladin serious concerns in Egypt and would, at the very least, have prevented him from acting in Syria while Egypt was threatened. Certainly it would have alleviated the pressure on Aleppo. What in fact occurred was that Byzantium was alienated and Saladin strengthened without having to fight. Philip's crusade to the Holy Land also gives us an opportunity to remark at how different the Christians from Europe had become from those who lived in the Holy Land. Those crusaders who continued to travel to Outremer, the crusader states, in the twelfth century found in the east a people whom they barely recognised. Admittedly they spoke the same language but they barely even shared the same culture any more. For example, when Usama Ibn Munqidh was invited to eat at a Christian house, his host reassured him that no pork was ever served at his table. Another incident with Usama reveals the extent of the difference: 'When I was in Jerusalem', he wrote, 'I used to go to the al-Aqsa mosque . . . which was in the hands of the Templars who were friends of mine.' Usama continues to say that the Templars would arrange for him to do his prayers in a corner. 'One day I had gone in, said the Allahu Akbar and risen to begin my prayers, when a Frank threw himself at me from behind, lifted me up so that I was facing east. "That's the way to pray!" he insisted.' Some Templars then intervened and took the man away and Usama resumed his prayers, only for the man to reappear and to force Usama to turn east again. Again the Templars took him away and apologised to Usama, and their words show us how different they had become from those who travelled from Europe: 'He is a foreigner who has just arrived today'. Over 80 years had passed since Jerusalem had become Christian and the generations which followed were not born in Europe. Most spoke Arabic and for them the defence of Jerusalem was less a defence of a holy city and more a defence of the only land which they had known – a situation not dissimilar to that of the *pieds noirs* in 1950s Algeria. By the second generation, Christians from the West were foreigners, and not just to the Muslims.

Saladin's defeat at Mont Gisard

Saladin must have been forewarned about a possible attack on Egypt, for he spent most of the winter of 1176 strengthening the fortifications of Alexandria and Damietta. It is hard to know how he interpreted the actions

of Philip, but clearly he must have been amazed by what seemed to be his good fortune. Not only had the joint attack on Egypt been scuppered by squabbling, but he now discovered that a considerable number of the Frankish knights had gone with Philip to attack Hama, leaving the road to Jerusalem open. At once he began to move his forces. The news greatly alarmed the young Baldwin, who had no military experience. Normally he would have relied on Humphrey of Toron, but he was gravely ill and indisposed, and as Baldwin marched to Ascalon to confront Saladin, accompanied by the Bishop of Bethlehem who carried the Holy Cross, the situation was so desperate that he issued the arriere ban, which obliged all able-bodied men to serve. This was seldom invoked and only in the most critical of circumstances.[6] Although he drew up his troops outside Ascalon, Baldwin was advised not to engage Saladin. Consequently, after some skirmishing, he retreated within the shelter of the city walls. It was at this point that Saladin made a serious error of judgement and allowed his troops to go off plundering, for he did not think his main force would be seriously threatened. But he had not accounted for the bravery of Baldwin – who was no more than 15 years old. With the 'courage of despair',[7] the king marched out of Ascalon, where he was joined by some Templars, and attacked Saladin's forces at 'Mont Gisard' – probably Tell Gezer, which is about 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Ascalon. Saladin was caught unawares; his troops, who had scattered, were even without weapons or armour. The Muslim army tried to rally and Taqi ul-Din distinguished himself that day with his bravery. Taqi ul-Din's son, Ahmed, also fought bravely and charged the Franks. He was then sent back on a second charge by his father, where he was slain. As the fighting raged, the Franks pushed the Muslims back until they scattered and were defeated. Saladin's own life was in danger, and he had to be rescued by his guards when three Frankish horsemen charged at him. He now retreated in short stages, hoping to rally his fleeing army, and was relieved to hear that Baldwin was content with his victory and had returned to Ascalon. For the next ten days Saladin found himself without provisions and enduring a fraught retreat under the most inclement weather, for the rain and cold did not cease. Upon reaching the desert his army had to overcome the problem of a lack of water and the death of their overworked horses. It was thanks to al-Qadi al-Fadil, who hired Bedouins and himself went into the desert to find Saladin, that a safe return to Cairo was negotiated. Others were less fortunate, for the Bedouin betrayed Isa

al-Hakkari and his brother to the Franks, and the two were taken prisoners. When the kingdom seemed about to be lost, the courage of the young leper king had resulted in a great victory.

It was after his return from the defeat of Mont Gisard that Saladin went to pay humble homage to al-Khabushani. However, spiritual matters had to take second place, for the priority for Saladin was to re-equip his army and to do so with utmost haste. At this stage a few words need to be said about the Muslim armies. A basic factor in the military history of Syria during this period was that any campaign that aimed at expelling the Franks was an ambitious undertaking, requiring a large composite army.[8] For routine duties or limited raids a standing force (askar) of slaves and freedmen was sufficient; but any ambitious campaign demanded the participation of the provincial governors with their contingents. In addition, warfare was seasonal. Once the winter rains had set in, the ground became unsuitable for movement, and the winter months afforded the amirs an opportunity to return to their lands. For these reasons armies that were large enough to threaten the existence of the Latin states never remained in the field for more than a campaign season and this was a factor of which the Franks were obviously aware. There was no pressure on them to engage the enemy, so for them a successful campaign was one in which they avoided anything more than skirmishes until the Muslim forces broke up. A third factor weighing heavily on a commander's mind was his men's desire for plunder. Noble appeals to fight the holy war may have attracted some, but the prospect of booty was the more powerful inducement. Saladin was defeated at Mont Gisard precisely because his forces, attracted by the loot, lost any cohesion. To bring together the disparate elements that formed a Muslim army and to keep them in the field required a commander of exceptional ability and unlimited patience. To the limitations mentioned above a dilemma and paradox need to be added. The dilemma was that the defeat of the Franks demanded a force larger than the one Syria could provide. Saladin knew that the forces of Egypt and Damascus were in themselves not enough to obtain victory; the manpower of Aleppo and Mesopotamia needed to be added. The paradox was that the larger the army, the greater the limitations. The more the number of amirs, the greater the chance of disputes; the further they had to travel meant the sooner they had to leave to be home for winter; and the larger the number of fighters, the less the proportion of booty.

Nevertheless the speed with which Saladin re-equipped his army – by February 1178 he had set out from Cairo – was a salutary lesson for the Franks. Baldwin's victory at Mont Gisard had been decisive but it had also been the exception. The Franks understood that the Muslims could never be defeated completely and they appreciated that the rewards of victory were not a sufficient inducement to risk a defeat that would be calamitous. The Muslims, in short, could afford to suffer many defeats, but the Franks knew that battles were simply not worth fighting, for the consequences of defeat could be immense.[9] Battle was best avoided, and for that to happen the army needed to be disciplined and ignore provocations such as feigned retreats, and attacks on flanks and rear. Above all the success of the Christian army depended upon effective co-operation between cavalry and infantry. It was incumbent on the infantry to maintain a human fortress from which the cavalry could launch charges and into which the cavalry could then withdraw.[10] Failure to maintain discipline and protect the cavalry could lead to disastrous consequences. As long as the Franks remained disciplined and maintained a passive solidity,[11] the Muslim armies could achieve little success, for the array of contingents which had been brought together for the spring and summer campaigns dispersed with the winter months. This was the cardinal lesson of warfare and it was one that the Franks could not afford to forget. Saladin of course knew this, and he also knew that the Franks needed their whole military strength to face his main army, so he took advantage by launching other raids to cause damage in territories that they were unable to defend. The aim of these attacks was always to destroy food crops and the harvest, since Saladin was well aware that the Franks regarded such activity as a prime cause of their own poverty and consequent inability to organise sufficient military resistance.[12]

Philip of Flander's siege of Hama had been lifted when the Kurd al-Mashtub, who had once vied for the vizierate of Egypt, had come to its rescue, but in the meantime Saladin's uncle Shihab al-Din had passed away. Philip and his forces then moved to besiege the castle of Harim, which lay 60 kilometres (37 miles) west of Aleppo and only 30 kilometres (18 miles) east of Antioch. The castle had been captured by Nur al-Din and its recapture would prove to be a great boost to Antioch. Given its proximity to Antioch, Harim should have fallen, but it resisted and the siege dragged on through the winter. Saladin's move at the head of his reassembled army into Syria altered the picture, for neither the Aleppans nor the Franks wanted

him to seize Harim for himself, and consequently terms were arranged by al-Salih in Aleppo and the Franks were bought off. Philip of Flanders then visited Jerusalem as a pilgrim, before sailing back to Europe. He had achieved nothing and his crusade was an anti-climax. But one cannot doubt his sincerity, for he had brought an army to the Holy Land at great financial cost and in the knowledge that he was neglecting his affairs at home. Nor can one doubt his courage, for he returned to Palestine as part of the Third Crusade, where he died during the siege of Acre.

Saladin arrived in Damascus from Egypt to discover rumblings of discontent over the conduct of Turan Shah, whom he had left as his deputy. Turan Shah had proven to be an incompetent administrator and a spendthrift, and Saladin had no option but to remove him. Turan Shah was the kind of soldier who came alive and stood firm in the heat of battle, but in times of peace became dissolute and dissipated and he now exacerbated Saladin's problems by insisting that he be given Baalbek, for he was not, in the words of Humphreys, to accept docilely such an insult from his younger brother. Saladin apparently felt unable to oppose him without a serious conflict.[13] The problem was that Baalbek was already in the hands of none other than Ibn al-Muqaddam, the man who had served Nur al-Din loyally and had invited Saladin into Syria. Clearly the resolution of this matter needed careful diplomacy. Saladin could not say no to his brother, for he ultimately depended on his family's support to build his dynasty. On the other hand, Ibn al-Muqaddam had proven to be a loyal supporter and there was no reason why he should cede his territory. Saladin now wrote to the caliph informing him that he was moving his army to Baalbek and justifying his act by stating that he had to guard the crops from the raids of the Franks. This was typical of the cautious Saladin; he prepared every move with a letter to the caliph – drafted more often than not by Imad al-Din al-Isfahani – in which he sought legitimacy for his action. Indeed, such was the volume of the correspondence sent to Baghdad that al-Qadi al-Fadil at one point urged him to ease off, in case Baghdad felt that he protested too much. At the end of 1178, with snow already falling, Saladin marched his army to Baalbek. According to Imad al-Din this was nothing more than a show of force with no intention of fighting, for Saladin spent most of the time hunting in a land that he knew well from his childhood. In reality both sides needed this charade of power; Saladin to make a public display of his strength, and Ibn al-Muqaddam to demonstrate that he would not give up

his possession easily. The truth was that, in Imad al-Din's words, 'Saladin flattered Ibn al-Muqaddam for all his age like a baby', and a generous agreement was reached which saw Ibn al-Muqaddam well rewarded elsewhere in return for his loyalty. This was Saladin *par excellence*: a letter to the caliph to justify his actions, a show of force to assert his leadership, kind words to resolve the issue and a generous settlement to ensure loyalty.

Meanwhile Baldwin IV spent 1178 strengthening the defences of his kingdom. The walls of Jerusalem were restored, and in the Upper Galilee Humphrey of Toron rebuilt the fortress of Chastelneuf, which had been abandoned. Then in the autumn of 1178 a major project was undertaken, which was the building of the castle of Le Chastellet at Jacob's Ford – also known as Bait al-Ahzan. This was a massive fortification and was considered of such importance – for it lay on one of the main routes to Damascus and was only a day's journey from that city – that Baldwin and his army remained there to protect the workforce. Once the fortress was completed, in April 1179, it was entrusted to the Templars, and 80 knights remained in the garrison with a total force of about 1,000 men. Saladin made no attempt to prevent the fortress being constructed; when told that it was nearing completion, his response was a composed one: 'When they have finished it, we shall go there and destroy it'. Despite his sangfroid, the castle's close proximity to Damascus effectively meant that he had to keep back a considerable force, otherwise the garrison would be able to raid his lands at will. In addition, the protracted affair of Baalbek had occurred at the same time as Bait al-Ahzan was being constructed. By March 1179 al-Qadi al-Fadil was beginning to get concerned, and he wrote to Imad al-Din about his fear that Saladin was becoming distracted from the holy war. There was no doubt that 1178 had been a good year for Baldwin and the Latin Kingdom.

In the spring of 1179 news reached Saladin that the Franks were planning a raid in the vicinity of Damascus. Led by Baldwin, the army was not expecting any resistance, but was surprised by Saladin's nephew Farrukh-Shah, who routed them. At first Saladin, who had been summoned from Damascus by carrier pigeon, did not know the extent of his victory and had assumed it had been a skirmish. It quickly transpired that Farruk-Shah had gained a considerable victory and that among the Frankish knights who had been slain was Humphrey of Toron, a knight with whom Saladin had crossed paths before during the siege of Alexandria and who, legend tells us, was so impressed by the valour that Saladin showed during the siege that he

knighted him. His death, in the words of Runciman, was a terrible blow to the kingdom, for he had been its one universally respected statesman.[14] Even the Muslim chroniclers noted the knight's valour: Ibn al-Athir commented that he was 'a man whose name was a proverb for bravery and skill in war'. A couple of months later, in June 1179, Saladin gained a second victory over Baldwin at Marj Uyun, when the Frankish army was scattered and Baldwin had to be rescued by one of his servants. Over 270 knights were paraded before Saladin's tent, among them the Templar Odo, who refused to be exchanged for an amir who was imprisoned in a Jerusalem jail, since he was outraged that Saladin should think that a Muslim amir was his equal. So he was dispatched to a prison in Damascus, where he died one year later. Baldwin's losses were, however, made good by the arrival of reinforcements from Europe, headed by Henry of Champagne.

Two fortuitous but decisive victories had followed each other and Saladin now took advantage of the Frankish disarray and turned his attention to the Bait al-Ahzan fortress and laid siege to it. In the last week of August 1179 the fortress fell and 700 Franks were taken captive. That day little mercy was shown; Saladin ordered the killing of all the Templars and crossbowmen, who were feared by the Muslims and regarded as dangerous foes. The castle was then destroyed, stone by stone, with Saladin standing by his men and helping pull the foundation stones with his own hands. But he would pay a heavy price, for the stench of the dead caused illnesses to spread, and both his nephew Taqi ul-Din and his cousin Nasr al-Din, son of Shirkuh, fell ill. Although both recovered, ten of Saladin's amirs fatally succumbed to the infections and this loss would amount to a greater loss, in human terms, than Saladin had suffered in battle up to date. Although the loss of the fortress was a blow to Frankish morale, no great damage had been done, and by the winter of 1179 it could be argued that the future of the Latin Kingdom was looking more assured than it had done since the death of King Amalric.[15] The reality was that this security was illusory. On the eve of its greatest trial, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem stood alone.

A truce was agreed upon and both sides welcomed it. Saladin wanted a truce to afford him time to turn his attention north to check the threat of Aleppo and Mosul. In addition the death of the Abbasid caliph al-Mustadi meant there was no harm in entering a truce, which would enable Saladin to see the lie of the land in Baghdad. As for Baldwin, his deteriorating health had led to deep divisions in the kingdom over who would marry

Baldwin's sister and thereby inherit the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. In addition, a severe drought had gripped Syria for several years and neither side could afford to further damage any grazing land, so both sides agreed to the truce unconditionally – a truce which was to last two years. William of Tyre, however, did not fail to pick up a point which others missed; this was the first instance in which the Franks had been obliged to make a truce without laying down at least some conditions. In his estimation, the balance of power had changed.

In June 1180 news reached Saladin of the death of Nur al-Din's nephew Saif al-Din of Mosul, whose rule over that city had been successful – at least in the negative sense in that he had not lost more territory to Saladin.[16] Saif al-Din had wanted to leave Mosul to his 12-year-old son Sanjar Shah, but wise heads dictated that his brother Izz al-Din Masud, whom Saladin had once defeated easily in battle, succeed him. For Saladin, Saif al-Din's death meant that the treaty that had been reached after he had defeated the Mosuli and Aleppan forces had terminated, and he wrote to the caliph claiming the towns of al-Ruha, Saruj and Harran, which had belonged to Nur al-Din but which Saif al-Din had taken in 1174. Strategically the three towns were very important, for if Saladin succeeded in gaining them he would effectively have cut Mosul off from Aleppo. Baghdad, however, turned a deaf ear to his appeal. Another death followed that of Saif al-Din, but this time on a very personal level, for it was while on campaign that Saladin heard that his brother Turan Shah had died and the news struck him hard. Turan Shah had not made Saladin's life easy; his dissipation and frivolity led to debts and political instability, but when Saladin had faced his greatest danger in Egypt it was Turan Shah who had stood firm by his side. Imad al-Din recorded that when the news was broken to him, Saladin asked for books of hadith be brought and to be left alone for the day.

In the meantime the Latin Kingdom was enduring its own internal torments when, worried about the deteriorating health of the king, Raymond of Tripoli and Bohemond of Antioch advanced on Jerusalem to force Baldwin to marry his sister to Baldwin of Ibelin. Baldwin IV quickly countered their move by arranging that Sibyl marry Guy of Lusignan, thereby presenting the rebels with a *fait accompli*. The choice of Guy was unpopular but clearly thought out; Guy came from Poitou, which formed part of the domains of Henry II of England, who was the only realistic ruler who could help the Latin Kingdom, since the French king had died in 1180

leaving a young son – which effectively meant there was no hope of a French crusade for several years. At the same time Baldwin did not want to alienate Byzantine support and he dispatched Joscelin of Edessa to Constantinople. However, Joscelin's arrival in the city coincided with the emperor Manuel's death. As a result, he remained for the winter while he completed the negotiations with the new government of Alexius II, who was 11 years old, and his mother Mary of Antioch, who acted as his regent.

The death of Nur al-Din's son and the struggle for northern Syria

In December 1181 Saladin was in Cairo when he received the news that changed the political picture in the most dramatic and unexpected manner: Nur al-Din's son al-Salih had died in Aleppo. In some ways al-Salih's death was the most fortunate of the series of timely deaths that marked the course of Saladin's career.[17] Had al-Salih lived to maturity it is hard to see how Saladin's career would have flourished. Admittedly Saladin would have remained powerful in Egypt, but his whole *raison d'être* of being in Syria was that he was Nur al-Din's political and spiritual heir – and the simple fact was that Nur al-Din already had an heir. Had al-Salih lived and demanded that Saladin hand back Damascus, then it would be difficult to see how he could have refused, without discrediting the moral platform which he had so assiduously built, and thereby appearing as the illegitimate usurper that the Zengids of Aleppo and Mosul claimed he was. But with al-Salih dead the political map had been dramatically altered, and to the victor lay the spoils. At once Saladin sent urgent instructions to Farrukh-Shah and Taqi ul-Din to prevent the Mosuli forces from taking over Aleppo. At the same time news had reached Jerusalem of al-Salih's death and the Franks also understood the enormity of what had taken place, and so Baldwin immediately acted to ensure that Aleppo did not fall into Saladin's hands. No sooner therefore had Farrukh-Shah departed from Damascus, than Reynald of Chatillon led a cavalry force towards Eilat. Farrukh-Shah had no choice but to turn back and lead an attack on Trans-Jordan, and the news of this caused Reynald to turn back. The result was what the Franks desired: Farrukh-Shah was unable to prevent the Mosulis from taking peaceful possession of Aleppo. Reynald's attack on Eilat, it should be noted, occurred while the truce was still in force, but the Franks understood how dangerous

it would be for them if Aleppo fell to Saladin. In attacking Eilat, and in breaking the truce, they were driven by a motivation which was greater than the desire of keeping the peace with Saladin – and that was the preserving the status of Aleppo as independent of Saladin. Amalric had once striven to capture Egypt from Saladin; now Baldwin strove to ensure that Aleppo did not fall to him. There can be no doubt that the Franks and the Mosulis were in close contact, for no sooner had Reynald moved towards Eilat, thereby distracting Farrukh-Shah, did Saif al-Din of Mosul cross the Euphrates and reach Aleppo. There he married al-Salih's mother – to further legitimise his claim – and he emptied the citadel of its armour. He also was quick to make a rapprochement with the Shiites in the city, restoring their privileges to them. The question of who would rule Aleppo for him was then resolved when he met with his brother Imad al-Din of Sinjar and it was agreed that Imad al-Din would swap Sinjar for Aleppo. In this way the nephews of Nur al-Din and the house of Zengi had control over Aleppo and Mosul.

Meanwhile Saladin prepared his army. The evening prior to his departure from Cairo he sat with some companions reciting poetry. The weather in the late spring was mild and he commented on how delightful the breeze was which carried the scent of the flowers with it. To this comment one of those gathered replied at once, without thinking, with a line of poetry: 'Enjoy while you can the perfume of the ox-eyed flowers of Nejd. After tonight there will be no more flowers.' The words disturbed Saladin, who took them for an omen. And to an extent they were, for he would never see Egypt again, the land which he vowed never to return to but which he had grown to love dearly. In May 1182 Saladin departed from Cairo, taking with him half his army and a large number of merchants and traders. When news reached Jerusalem, Baldwin summoned an assembly to determine the response. Reynald of Chatillon urged that the army march to Kerak in order to block the Egyptian army, while Raymond of Tripoli was worried that this would leave the kingdom unprotected. Raymond's words were, however, ignored, as it was considered unwise to divide the army. The fact was the Franks were more concerned about protecting the harvest than engaging the enemy. Nor was Saladin particularly concerned about fighting at this stage. At the same time, knowing that the whole Frankish army was gathered in one place, he took advantage of making secondary attacks, which caused damage to their harvest and laid waste to the cultivated countryside. And so he ordered Farrukh-Shah to invade Galilee, much to Raymond's

consternation, and plunder Frankish land. By the time Saladin reached Damascus news would have reached him of a coup in Constantinople, which saw the coming to power of Andronicus Comnenus, who was notoriously anti-Latin. Andronicus was well-known in the Latin East, for he had caused a scandal not once but twice. First, he had seduced the Byzantine empress's sister, Philippa of Antioch, and had as a result fled to Jerusalem, where he had been given refuge by Amalric. There however he caused further scandal when he eloped with Baldwin III's widow, Theodora, and this time sought refuge in, of all places, Nur al-Din's court. What the austere Nur al-Din made of this artful lothario is unknown, but Andronicus lived with the Muslims for many years until he was reconciled with Manuel and returned to Constantinople. Now he was in power, and Saladin felt confident he would not come to the Latin Kingdom's aid if it was attacked. In 1181 the Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus had dispatched an embassy to Cairo and a treaty had been signed. This treaty and another one, signed by Andronicus and Saladin in June 1185, effectively freed Saladin from fear of Byzantine attack.

Within days Saladin was on the move again, and he invaded the Kingdom of Jerusalem without delay. On 13 July a detachment of his army laid siege to the castle of Baisan in southern Galilee and Baldwin marched to its relief. Although what took place has been termed a battle, it was more an attempt by the Muslims to force an engagement with the Franks refusing to be drawn. Turkish mounted archers assailed the Franks and on occasion the Latin knights fought back. The intense heat of the day also took its toll and William of Tyre noted that many died that day from heatstroke, including the Canon of the Sepulchre, who was carrying the Holy Cross. Denied tactical success, Saladin withdrew. Credit must go to Baldwin who, despite his illness, demonstrated considerable willpower, tenacity, discipline and courage, for it was clear he understood the terms of engagement and refused to take the Muslim bait. Saladin then turned his attention to the city of Beirut, which he knew was the weakest point in the Frankish control of the Syrian coast. While he was in Egypt he had built up a fleet of between 30 and 40 war galleys,[18] and he now launched a sea and land attack on the city. At the same time he ordered his brother, al-Adil, to launch raids around Darum and Gaza. This appeared to be a serious and well-coordinated attack[19] and when Baldwin heard of these developments he had to make a difficult choice: either to divide his army to confront the two

challenges or to remain united and defend Beirut. Calculating that the loss of Beirut would be a far greater blow to Frankish moral, he chose the latter option. For three days Saladin launched an intense bombardment on Beirut, with the arrows – in the words of William of Tyre – filling the air like hail. In the meantime Baldwin ordered ships from Acre and Tyre to sail to relieve Beirut. Although the capture of the city would have been a spectacular success for Saladin, his withdrawal after only three days of siege was a sign that he recognised that even had it fallen, he would not have been able to hold it. In any case at this stage the Franks were not his main or immediate concern.[20] Although he now moved north, the Franks were unsettled because, contrary to normal practice, he deliberately chose not to make a truce.

Having called off the attack on Beirut, Saladin marched to Baalbek, which he reached around the middle of August 1182. The pace of the march was deliberately slow and it took him 40 days to reach the Euphrates. The aim was to gather support along the way and thereby to gain momentum, and he wrote that the amirs of the land were sending him envoys and support. Near Aleppo he was joined by Muzaffar al-Din Keukburi, who held the town and citadel of Harran, and who had fought against Saladin at the battle of Tell al-Sultan. Now he informed Saladin that he was prepared to change sides and urged him to cross the Euphrates and claim the lands that lay east of the river. 'These lands are yours', he assured him. Keukburi's change of sides was cemented by his marriage to Saladin's sister: a formidable ally had been gained. Keukburi's words tempted Saladin, for he knew that Aleppo would put up a strong resistance and any siege would have to endure the harsh winter months. By contrast, a campaign east of the Euphrates held opportunities. Although he would leave his rear exposed to an Aleppan attack, he remained confident that any attacks would not cause him too many problems. In late September 1182 he reached al-Bira, which was one of the crossing points on the Euphrates, where he was welcomed by Shihab al-Din Mahmud. He handed Saladin the keys of his citadel, which Saladin returned to him. Saladin wrote to al-Adil asking him to send him money, which he urgently needed to win over the cities which lay ahead, for liberality was the key to success. Having crossed the Euphrates, Saladin marched to al-Ruha, which was held by none other than Fakhr al-Din al-Zafarani, who had once entered Saladin's service but had left in anger when Homs had not been given to him. Although Izz al-Din sent some troops from Mosul to come to al-Ruha's aid, they arrived too late and al-Ruha fell

peacefully to Saladin. In the meantime in Aleppo Imad al-Din Zengi took advantage of Saladin's crossing of the Euphrates and attacked Manbij. He even crossed the Euphrates and raided Saruj, but Saladin did not turn back since the Aleppans were not strong enough to trap him. In fact he was not in a hurry, and did not press towards Mosul. It appears – as previously in his march on Damascus – that his motives were psychological, that is to turn a military expedition into a triumphal progress.[21] And so as he moved eastwards, he received the submission of Harran and al-Raqqa – which was held by Qutb al-Din Inal, who had once threatened Saladin with his sword but who was now won over by his purse. By 10 November Saladin was camped outside Mosul: Imad al-Din al-Isfahani commented that within one year he had watered his horse in the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris.

Saladin had also written to Farrukh-Shah requesting money but he did not receive a reply, for Farrukh-Shah had fallen ill and died. An accomplished poet with a great fondness for the poetry of al-Mutanabbi, Farrukh-Shah left behind a reputation for valour and bravery on the battlefield. His loss was a considerable blow to Saladin, who now appointed Ibn al-Muqaddam – proof that the dispute over Baalbek had been truly healed – to the governership of Damascus. In the meantime, as they anxiously watched Saladin's peaceful promenade across the cities of the Euphrates, Izz al-Din of Mosul and his brother Imad al-Din of Aleppo approached the Franks and made peace with Bohemond III of Antioch and Rupen III of Cilicia. A few months later, while Saladin was crossing the Euphrates, Izz al-Din of Mosul sent envoys to Baldwin in Jerusalem and agreed an 11-year truce, in return for which Mosul agreed to pay an annual subsidy of 10,000 dinars. In addition, Mosul agreed to release all Frankish prisoners. The Mosuli–Frankish alliance seemed as firm as ever. The agreement settled, Baldwin immediately launched into action with the aim of cutting Saladin's lines of communication. He first raided Damascene territory. Ibn al-Muqaddam, with too few men to risk combat, was unable to challenge him, and Baldwin was free to burn the harvest. The leper king then threatened to destroy the mosque at Darayya, but was told by a deputation of Christians that if he did so he would needlessly antagonise the Muslim population and that in return Ibn al-Muqaddam would inevitably wreak great damage on the Christian churches in the province, and he desisted. Then he led his forces to Bosra, which lay 145 kilometres (90 miles) to the south and which was the first settlement on the desert road from Damascus to Egypt.

If the Franks could capture it then Saladin would have had no choice but to turn back, but its inhabitants blocked all the wells outside the walls, making it impossible to besiege. Knowing that Saladin was too far north and that Ibn al-Muqaddam was unable to offer much resistance, Baldwin then turned to the fortress of al-Habis Jaldak, which Farrukh-Shah had captured a few months earlier. After a brief siege the fortress fell to him. Frankish control over eastern Galilee was thus restored.[22] Saladin was kept in touch with what was happening, but was unconcerned and appeared dismissive: 'While they knock down villages we are taking cities'. There was reason for his relaxed manner. He knew that lacking support from Byzantium, the Franks could not attack Egypt, and that the raids launched by Baldwin were insufficient in themselves to force him to turn back. He interpreted them as being little more than diversionary tactics and he regarded them as symptoms of the impotent anger felt by the Franks because he had left Syria without troubling to negotiate a truce.

One question still disturbed many – including al-Qadi al-Fadil – what was Saladin doing? It was clear that the fall of Mosul would mean the fall of Aleppo, but what was less clear was what Saladin was doing besieging Mosul, or indeed how he could justify it. As far as Aleppo was concerned, a case could be made, since with Nur al-Din's son al-Salih dead, Saladin had the best claim. But no such claim could possibly apply to Mosul. This was a point which the Mosulis were quick to make to the caliph, and Saladin could not have been optimistic when he saw how well Izz al-Din had fortified the city. When Taqi ul-Din suggested the use of mangonels, Saladin replied, 'One does not set up mangonels against a city like this . . . Even if we destroyed a tower . . . who could take the city when there are so many people there?' The situation was a stalemate: the Mosulis could not drive Saladin away and he could not take the city by assault. In addition, the longer he besieged Mosul the weaker his position became in Syria. His solution was to turn from Mosul to Sinjar, which surrendered peacefully after a 15-day siege and which was given to Taqi ul-Din. The leading citizens came out and were treated with the courtesy that had now become customary with Saladin. He repaired the damage done during the siege and extracted no advantage for himself from the capture, so boosting his reputation for generosity even among those who previously had been sceptical. Although he had been unable to capture Mosul – nor did he realistically expect to – he had succeeded in cutting off the Zengids of Aleppo from those of Mosul.

At the beginning of 1183, al-Adil, and al-Qadi al-Fadil wrote to Saladin with some alarming news: the Franks had made an audacious assault on the heart of Islam. They were referring to the raid made by Reynald of Chatillon on Arabia and the city of Medina, where the Prophet was buried. It was truly an extraordinary adventure: Reynald had spent two years having ships built in sections, which were then transported by camels – which had been hired from the Bedouins – and brought down to the Gulf of Aqaba where the ships were reconstructed. Reynald had then set sail down the Red Sea and landed north of Jeddah. Whether Reynald was trying to establish a Frankish presence in the vicinity or was – as Muslims were convinced – attempting to remove the Prophet's body and transport it to Frankish territory is unclear, but the flamboyant raid caused a seismic shock among Muslims. It was al-Adil, who had been left in charge of Egypt, who orchestrated the Muslim counter-attack. The Muslim fleet destroyed the Frankish ships and Bedouins were employed to track down those who had already landed and were heading for Medina. For five days and nights the Muslim army tracked down the raiding party, numbering around 170 men, and as each day passed and Medina got closer, Muslim anxiety increased. Finally, however, they were captured. A couple were sent to Mecca and the rest to Medina and Alexandria, where Saladin ordered their execution. To his surprise, however, al-Adil refused to execute the prisoners and requested that he first consult with the religious scholars. The reason for this was that in the pursuit the Franks were promised quarter by the Muslims. However, Saladin persisted in his demand that the men be put to the sword, arguing that sacred territory had been attacked and that the men now knew the route to Medina and so they could not be allowed to live. Finally Saladin's orders were carried out, but his insistence and his overriding of his brother's decision betrayed the anxiety he undoubtedly felt. How realistic the Frankish attempt had been is unclear, but its daring nature caused Saladin great embarrassment. It was his absence in northern Syria that had given Reynald his opportunity, and his determination to settle the dispute with Aleppo and Mosul opened him to charges that he was putting his own dynastic interests before those of Islam.[23] Saladin had sailed very close to disaster. Reynald's raid into the heart of Islam, dramatic as it was, was also not without a strategic motive – which was to force Saladin to turn back from Mosul. The Franks would thus be aiding their Zengid allies while protecting their own interests by restraining the growth of Saladin's power in Syria.[24]

By May 1183 Saladin had turned back to lay siege to Aleppo. In the city Nur al-Din's nephew, Imad al-Din Zengi, had lost his appetite for a long fight. He had once ruled Sinjar and he now sought to return there. So he was not opposed to opening secret negotiations with Saladin's camp, during which he made it known that he would be prepared to exchange Aleppo for Sinjar. And so to the astonishment of its people, on 12 June 1183, Aleppo opened its gates peacefully to Saladin. The Aleppans sent two amirs to negotiate, one of whom was Izz al-Din Jurdik, who had once been imprisoned by the Aleppans. An interesting point of the agreement was Saladin's decision to replace the Hanafi qadi and khatib (preacher) with Shafii ones. This was an uncommon act for Saladin, who normally never interfered in such matters, and it may have had something to do with the previous support given to the Shiites in the city. On the following day, 13 June, Imad al-Din Zengi finally came face to face with Saladin, who held a splendid reception for him. During this reception news reached Saladin that his brother Buri had died of a wound he had incurred during a skirmish with an Aleppan force, but Saladin showed no expression and the reception was not disrupted. He showed Imad al-Din his customary generosity and allowed him to take with him all the citadel stores that he could remove. One of the conditions, however, was that Imad al-Din would come with his troops when Saladin was fighting the Franks. And it was Saladin's generosity which won over the people of Aleppo and in particular Nur al-Din's mamluks, who now joined his service. To Saladin, Aleppo was the eye of Syria and – despite his lack of money, which forced him to make urgent appeals to Egypt – he was content, for he had won Aleppo cheaply and without any great loss, even though he mourned for the death of his brother.

It had taken Saladin nearly nine years finally to capture Aleppo, a city that he had once boasted he would milk. The house of Zengi had resisted the advances of that of Ayyub and twice they had dispatched assassins to kill him. But Aleppo could not resist the momentum and pressure that Saladin had built up. He had spent money liberally to win over the amirs, and had persistently written to the caliph, arguing that without Aleppo and Mosul the holy war could not be effectively fought. Whether he truly believed this to be the case or not is less important than the fact that he consistently advocated it. And Aleppo had fallen peacefully – a testimony of Saladin's diplomatic skills. This was a crucial point, for Saladin could neither afford to

be dragged into a long siege nor could he accept a bloody conflict where Nur al-Din's lieutenants fell, for he needed these men. He was fortunate that Aleppo was ruled by Imad al-Din Zengi, whose career had been one of disappointment,[25] and whose ambition in crossing west of the Euphrates was never matched by his abilities in establishing himself there. The Aleppans were outraged by Imad al-Din Zengi's betrayal of their city and a popular chant of the day was about a donkey who had sold milk for sour milk, but the Aleppans were traders and Saladin quickly soothed their anger through the generous distribution of money and conciliatory behaviour, though it is noteworthy that strict instructions were issued to the Shiites to stop defaming the orthodox caliphs of Islam. Saladin had lost a brother to win a city, but he was now in a very strong position, for the armies of Aleppo, Damascus and Egypt were united behind him and the encirclement of the Franks was nearly complete. The two horns of the Muslim crescent – Egypt and North Syria – were firmly in the Saladin's grasp. Muslim unity after nearly a century of disunity was now at hand, and the prospects for the Franks boded ill.[26]

Chapter 10

Sailing Close to Disaster: Saladin's Illness at Harran

Affairs do not run according to human desire, nor do we know how much is left of our lives.

Saladin

The summer of 1183 was a perilous time for the Latin Kingdom, for no sooner had Saladin returned to Damascus after the successful surrender of Aleppo, than he began to gather his forces. Baldwin's health meanwhile had deteriorated to the extent where he was confined to bed, though when news reached him that Saladin had mustered his army to the south of Damascus, he urgently summoned all the senior members: Raymond of Tripoli, Reynald of Chatillon, Baldwin of Ibelin. And of course Guy of Lusignan, who was the heir apparent, having married Baldwin's sister and whom Baldwin designated as regent and commander-in-chief, even though he was deeply unpopular among the barons. Such was the perceived danger from Saladin that help was called from the Genoese and Pisan colonies on the coast, who responded by sending troops. Even the pilgrims were summoned, and all able-bodied men were prepared for combat. On 29 September Saladin crossed the Jordan and attacked Baisan, which he found deserted. For the next eight days the two armies watched each other. The Muslims continued to harass and provoke the Christian army

into charging, but Guy kept a tight rein on his forces and they would not be provoked. The Muslims were limited to archery assaults, while the Franks kept their cavalry screened by their infantry in order to protect their horses from Muslim arrows. Patiently Saladin probed and waited for his opponents to make a mistake and to charge; Imad al-Din al-Isfahani noted 'everyday we expected them to charge, rushing into battle as was their custom', but the Franks stubbornly refused to take the bait and maintained their discipline. When after a week of skirmishing Saladin's amirs approached him and told him that provisions were running low, Saladin ended the campaign.

At first sight it appears that little that was substantial had occurred, but in fact a precedent had been set which would have profound and ultimately disastrous repercussions for the Latin Kingdom. With Baldwin incapacitated, Guy had led the army – the largest army, as William of Tyre noted, that the Franks had ever gathered – and he had remained on the defensive and allowed Saladin to devastate the Christian territory with impunity. This strategy of containment provoked criticism from some of the Franks, who accused him of cowardice and who insisted that he should have launched an attack. However, these accusations were driven by jealousy and not sound military judgement. To his critics, Guy was a handsome but arrogant fool and a debauchee,[1] but the truth was that Guy had acted competently. For the fact was that a huge Muslim army had invaded Christian territory but had made no territorial gains, while the Franks had suffered no losses. Guy's problem was that he could not count on the support of the other lords, who were prepared to see him fail because they feared that any success would strengthen his position. Admittedly there had been severe logistic problems which had nearly left the army starving, but on the whole Guy had conducted a text-book campaign, pursuing a successful defensive strategy with minimum risk.[2] For Guy to win, all he had to do was to remain disciplined. Even Saladin accepted that the Franks had adopted a successful military strategy, which he had been unable to break down. And had the same defensive strategy been adopted four years later, then the devastating defeat of Hattin would have been avoided.

Having crossed back over the Jordan, Saladin returned to Damascus, where he instructed al-Adil to leave Egypt and take command of Aleppo, while he sent Taqi ul-Din to assume his position in Egypt. In the meantime Baldwin had recovered slightly and returned to Jerusalem, where he dismissed Guy as regent and resumed his position in authority. Although Guy

had been criticised for his military campaign, the dispute between him and the king was unrelated to this matter. No matter, the dismissal and humiliation of Guy by Baldwin was deliberate and public, and the king now installed his nephew, the young Baldwin V, as heir. Raymond of Tripoli – who was vehemently opposed to Guy – was appointed as regent. The relations between Guy and Baldwin continued to deteriorate, until Baldwin tried to annul his sister's marriage to him. Several times Baldwin summoned Guy as his vassal to attend him in Jerusalem and each time Guy excused himself on the grounds of ill health. In accordance therefore with Jerusalem custom, the ailing king was carried in his litter to Ascalon to ask for Guy's attendance,[3] only to find the city gates closed against him. Baldwin was forced to be carried to the gates himself and knock and demand admission, but Guy defied him and the gates remained bolted. A furious Baldwin now sought to dispossess Guy, since such a public defiance could not be tolerated, but it appears he took no further action and Guy remained undisturbed in his possession of Ascalon.

At the end of October 1183, Saladin left Damascus. This time his destination was Kerak, for it was there that the wedding of Humphrey IV of Toron and Baldwin IV's half-sister was being held. Saladin was certainly aware of this, and his attack on the stronghold of Kerak was planned to coincide with the festivities. Together with Shaubak, which lay about 100 kilometres (60 miles) to the south, Kerak – the stronghold of Reynald of Chatillon – made the crossing between Syria and Egypt hazardous unless accompanied by a strong military escort. Soon Saladin had surrounded the castle and seven mangonels kept up a day and night bombardment. Surreally, inside the castle a wedding was taking place, and the castle was full of minstrels and actors. The story goes that Humphrey of Toron's mother sent out food from the wedding banquet to Saladin. Not to be outdone in gallantry, Saladin asked where in the castle the wedding was taking place and then gave strict instructions that it should not be bombarded so that the newly married couple would not be disturbed. In fact Saladin did not press home his advantage and soon called off the siege. In any case he was at Kerak for another reason, for he was waiting for a caravan from Egypt led by al-Adil, who was on his way to assume his responsibilities in Aleppo. However, Baldwin, who was too ill to ride and was carried on a litter, immediately led his army from Jerusalem to relieve Kerak. By then, however, Saladin had retreated to Damascus, which he reached in December 1183.

By the spring of 1184 Saladin was once again on the offensive, and for the first time we begin to see the benefits of his endless campaigning in the north, for he was joined by the forces of Aleppo under al-Adil and also by the Egyptian army under the command of Taqi ul-Din. He was also joined by amirs from the east of the Euphrates, most notably another brother of Izz al-Din of Mosul. Not to be outdone, Mardin and Sinjar also sent forces. Saladin was clearly not in a hurry and it was not until the beginning of July that he reached Frankish territory, where he ravaged territory until the army finally gathered at Kerak in the middle of August 1184. Nine mangonels were ranged against the walls of the castle and they caused immense damage. When news reached Jerusalem, an army was gathered and the king, unable to ride, was carried in a litter. The approach of the Franks forced Saladin to lift the siege of Kerak, and he then moved 65 kilometres (40 miles) north to Hisban, where he had a commanding position to block any Frankish advance. He then waited to see if the Franks were prepared to engage him in battle, but when they showed no sign of doing so, and knowing that all their forces were at Kerak, he knew that he could plunder the Frankish lands unchallenged. Nablus, Jenin and Sebastea were raided in quick succession, with booty and prisoners being taken. Soon after, in mid-September 1184, Saladin returned to Damascus and disbanded his army.

The death of Baldwin IV

By the beginning of 1185 it was clear that Baldwin IV was dying. The succession had been arranged, for his nephew Baldwin V – known affectionately as Baudouinette – had been anointed co-king in the same year. On the day he died, Baldwin IV gathered his vassals for the last time to bid them adieu. By now, the illness had taken its terrible toll and he had become blind, deformed and crippled. He was just 23 years old and had ruled for 11 years. On 16 May 1185, after enduring unimaginable pain, Baldwin IV died, and was buried near his father in the chapel of the Latin Kings in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the foot of Mount Calvary, the most holy place of Christendom, which he had striven to defend throughout his reign.[4] Despite his terrible illness, Baldwin had conducted himself with tremendous fortitude, and as long as he had lived he had kept Saladin in check. Every Muslim attack had been met by a Christian army, and under

his leadership the Franks had frustrated Saladin's attempts to encircle them. Not only at the scene of his great victory at Mont Gisard but throughout his brief and pain-ridden reign, Baldwin had proved himself to be a match for the great Saladin. The regent chosen for the young Baldwin V was Raymond of Tripoli, who at once sent a message to Saladin requesting a truce. Somewhat surprisingly Saladin agreed, for he was anxious to cross the Euphrates, where Izz al-Din of Mosul was up to his old tricks and had allied with al-Pahlawan of Azerbaijan and the Shah Arman of Akhlat and was threatening his recently gained lands. In 1182 Saladin had crossed the Euphrates without bothering with a truce, but this time caution prevailed and a general truce was arranged. One of the reasons for his caution was that he was aware that the patriarch Heraclius – a cleric who openly paraded his mistress, known as the patriarchess[5] – had been sent from Jerusalem to the West, urgently seeking military help. In the spring of 1185 Saladin left Damascus on a campaign expected to last a few weeks; he did not return until May 1186, during which time his life reached its nadir.

As mentioned above, a new embassy left Jerusalem to implore aid from Europe. The envoys were of the highest order; apart from the patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem, the embassy also contained the masters of the Templars and Hospitallers. The embassy travelled first to the Pope and then on to France, where they offered Philip Augustus the keys of the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre. Philip quickly refused this offer, and as soon as was diplomatically possible shipped them to England. Often portrayed as a figure of mockery, openly flaunting his mistress, Heraclius came to England displaying much gold and silver and heavily perfumed – to the English not signs of austerity. But he was not a fool. As soon as he landed he performed the pilgrimage to the tomb of Thomas Becket. This was a deliberate gesture meant to embarrass Henry, for 13 years had passed since Becket's murder and what had Henry done for Jerusalem to atone for his sins? Even in his opulent adornment Heraclius had a deliberate message. Over the years Henry made very large payments to the Latin Kingdom but it seems he did not permit anyone to spend it. Indeed he reserved the right to recall all his money from the East at any time. By 1187 his Eastern account was said to have reached 30,000 marks of silver. He kept promising a crusade, he kept sending money, but it remained frozen – for Henry's parsimony was as notorious as Saladin's generosity. By 1182, when Henry made his will at Waltham, his Eastern account had grown to such a

magnitude that measures had to be taken to ensure its proper management. In that sense Heraclius' adornment was calculated: 'We want a prince not money', he railed, when his patience at Henry's prevarications finally snapped. 'From everywhere we receive money, but no prince.' The failure of Heraclius' mission came as a big blow to Jerusalem, but it had one salutary effect: it had been final proof that Henry was not going to take up the Cross. But what of the immense wealth which he had accumulated in Jerusalem? And what was to be done with it?

Saladin's march on Mosul

In the meantime Saladin had crossed the Euphrates in another attempt to subdue Mosul. He was initially encouraged by the death of the Shah Arman, but as long as Mosul resisted and received support from al-Pahlawan of Azerbaijan, Saladin was unable to break the stalemate. It was during this period when we detect visible signs of a distancing between al-Qadi al-Fadil and Saladin. It was clear that al-Qadi al-Fadil did not approve of Saladin returning to besiege Mosul – he had once written to him praising the waters of the Nile to that of the Euphrates, but Saladin had chosen to ignore his words. In al-Qadi al-Fadil's mind, Saladin had allowed himself to become distracted and had lost sight of the holy war. In one letter he wrote cryptically to Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, 'There remains what I have not indicated and what I cannot mention of the fact that the means fall short of the desired end'. From Egypt he warned Saladin not to pester the caliph with letters and appeals: 'The water in the spring must be allowed to fill up' – a sign of his frustration and growing disillusionment. When he wrote saying that he intended to go on pilgrimage and received a reply discouraging him, he had even contemplated resigning and leaving Saladin's service. What could have brought on al-Qadi al-Fadil's extraordinary decision? For over 15 years he had stood by Saladin and served him to the point where he had become perhaps the second most important man in the land. 'I have not conquered the lands with my sword, but with al-Qadi al-Fadil's pen', Saladin had repeated on several occasions, and he listened carefully to al-Qadi al-Fadil's advice not just on political and administrative matters but on military ones as well. And yet disenchantment had set in on al-Qadi al-Fadil's part and there can be no doubt that Saladin's adventure in Mosul was the cause.

What exactly was Saladin doing in Mosul? Even those closest to him were uncertain. He himself continued to insist, in letters to the caliph, that he needed the troops of Mosul in order to fight the holy war, but his words did not convince. Personal and dynastic ambitions were certainly at play; Saladin was carving out an empire for himself and for his family. His territories already exceeded those conquered by Nur al-Din, and who knew what lay behind Mosul – Georgia, Constantinople, Anatolia, even Baghdad? At the same time he may have felt more comfortable in the confines of Mosul; he was, after all, Kurdish and not Syrian or Egyptian. It is interesting to note that the two men who insisted he pursue his ambitions towards Mosul were Isa al-Hakkari and al-Mashtub, both of whom were Kurds from the nearby Hakkari region. We simply do not know what was in Saladin's mind, but we can be certain that for Saladin personal and family ambition co-existed with moral and religious goals. In Egypt he had endeavoured to establish the foundations of the Sunni Revival with great sincerity, and in doing so had proven that he was a man of his age. Now, to the frustration of the ulama, his ambitions east of the Euphrates were confirming that he truly was a man of his age.

Saladin's illness

Then on 3 December 1185 Saladin fell ill and withdrew to Harran. As a result the siege of Mosul had to be lifted and his army disbanded. At first, al-Qadi al-Fadil did not appreciate the seriousness of the matter and made an excuse not to travel to see Saladin. But rapidly it became clear that the illness was grave and shortly after there came a time when Saladin's life hung in the balance. Al-Qadi al-Fadil now wrote urgently to Imad al-Din al-Isfahani to move Saladin to Aleppo as soon as possible, for he feared the unrest that would follow if he were to die. In January 1186 Saladin's wife, Ismat al-Din, died and strict instructions were given to keep the news away from him. Urgently physicians were despatched to Harran, but by February 1186 the illness had worsened and Saladin was no longer able to sit up and was barely conscious. Imad al-Din took Saladin's last will and testament, for it was feared that he was at death's door. The news of Saladin's illness spread rapidly from Mosul to Cairo, and a sense of unrest and anxiety gripped people, for it was uncertain what would unfold next. Al-Adil rushed over from Aleppo – a distance of 200 kilometres (125 miles) and hazardous in

winter – with his own personal physician, while Saladin's other brother Tughtekin was in distant Yemen. The question on everyone's lips was who would succeed Saladin? His eldest son, al-Afdal, was 15 years old and in Egypt, and he was under the guardianship of Taqi ul-Din. But would Taqi ul-Din, having tasted the power and wealth of Egypt, be able to relinquish it and content himself with being a guardian? In a moment of lucidity Saladin had tried to get his amirs to pledge their allegiance to his son, but that proved fruitless, for few were prepared to do so. Once, a few years earlier, a young boy al-Salih, Nur al-Din's son, was unable to hold together what his father had built; now it was clear that another would also not be up to the task. If Saladin had any illusions that his relations would sink their differences, his long fever at Harran taught him otherwise.[6]

Saladin and al-Qadi al-Fadil: renewed vows

Not surprisingly, both al-Qadi al-Fadil and Imad al-Din al-Isfahani viewed Saladin's illness in providential terms, so as soon as he began slowly to recover, they became determined not to let the opportunity slip. Mildly chastising Saladin, Imad al-Din wrote that that sickness was sent by God to 'turn away sins . . . and to wake him from the sleep of forgetfulness', and he surrounded him with preachers and jurists, although Saladin objected to the presence of jurists for he wearied of their arguing. Al-Qadi al-Fadil was even more direct. When Saladin had returned to Damascus and was convalescing, he visited him and urged him to vow to God that if he recovered he would never fight Muslims again but would devote himself to the holy war. Saladin then took al-Qadi al-Fadil's hand and repeated the vow, adding that he would also slay Reynald of Chatillon, and with this symbolic holding of hands the alliance between the military and the scholar was reforged. Since the autumn of 1174 Saladin had spent some 13 months fighting the Franks and 33 against his fellow Muslims.[7] But he never campaigned east of the Euphrates again and within a year of his recovery the Latin Kingdom had been devastated and Jerusalem regained.

Al-Qadi al-Fadil had been critical of the truce which Saladin had agreed with Raymond of Tripoli, for Saladin had been under no pressure to enter into it. In fact the truce served Saladin well, for during his illness, and with Damascus vulnerable, the Franks respected it. So when knights who had responded to Heraclius arrived in Palestine to fight, they were not allowed

to. Now as Saladin's health improved, so did his fortune. Al-Pahlawan of Azerbaijan – Mosul's ally – died in the first months of 1186, and with his death Izz al-Din of Mosul lost his own ally and found himself isolated. The time for a rapprochement with Saladin was opportune. Mosul's ambassador to Saladin was Baha ul-Din Ibn Shaddad, who wrote that 'When the news of the sultan's illness was received in Mosul we saw that it was an opportunity not to be neglected, for we knew how readily that prince lent his ear to an appeal, and how tender hearted he was'. Ibn Shaddad was commanded to negotiate an agreement – it was symbolic that he would end up entering Saladin's service and serving him as his army judge and biographer. On the day of Arafat, which commemorated the pilgrimage, Saladin finally swore the oath that bound him to peaceful terms with Mosul. It was Ibn Shaddad who administered the oath and who also made al-Adil swear. As the Mosuli delegation was taking its leave, news reached Saladin of the death of Muhammad, the son of Shirkuh. Since Saladin was still too ill to sit up for long, al-Adil sat to receive the condolences. The treaty – concluded on 4 March 1186 – obliged Izz al-Din to recognise Saladin as his overlord and provide him with troops against the Franks. Saladin responded with his usual generosity and secured Izz al-Din's position. And with this agreement, Saladin had finally achieved what he had set out to do in 1174: he had obtained both the minimum goal of his campaign and one of the major goals of his reign.[8] Although 12 years had passed, finally Mosul, Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo had agreed to supply troops and the encirclement of the Franks was complete.

By the end of May 1186 Saladin was back in Damascus and was greeted by the news of the death of the young Baldwin V, who had died in Acre. His death – sudden but not unexpected, for he had been a sickly child – precipitated a crisis in the kingdom. It meant the succession of Guy of Lusignan who – through his marriage to Baldwin IV's sister – was the rightful heir. Opinion, however, was divided; though it was agreed that Sibyl had the best claim to the throne and that accordingly Guy should be king, others felt he was unsuitable, since Baldwin IV had so assiduously tried to bar him and annul his sister's marriage.[9] Finally, after some chicanery, Sybil and Guy were crowned, although Raymond of Tripoli refused to attend the coronation and retired to Tiberias. Baldwin of Ibelin, who detested Guy, also refused to pay homage to the new king and left the kingdom to take service with Bohemond of Antioch. Saladin had always been well-informed

of events taking place in the Latin Kingdom, and one assumes he would have closely followed the events that followed the death of Baldwin V.

But what took place next would nevertheless have come as a surprise. When Raymond of Tripoli refused to pay homage to Guy, the king was determined to march on Tiberias to confront him. This alarmed Raymond greatly and, though the following events are not clear, it appears that he made contact with Saladin – via his nephew, Taqi ul-Din – and agreed to come to terms with the Muslims. This led to Guy withdrawing his forces, because he was not prepared to go to war with Saladin while his kingdom was so divided.[10] In any case, the truce still held, although it was due to expire in Easter 1187. Why Raymond chose to approach Saladin is a question that has puzzled historians. Although he owed no allegiance to Guy, whom he viewed as a parvenu and usurper, he did owe loyalty to the kingdom, and by allowing Saladin's troops to garrison in Tiberias he was betraying his fellow Franks.[11] As a fourth generation inhabitant of Outremer, he was fluent in Arabic and counted many Muslims among his friends. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani even went as far as to write that had he not been fearful of his fellow Christians, he would have become a Muslim. Accustomed to the political game that had been played out in Syria for decades, he had perhaps assumed that Saladin would support his claim to the kingship. What he had not understood – until it was too late – was that Saladin was not intent on playing games. The best that can be said about Raymond was that he was being short-sighted, for Saladin was more dangerous as an ally than Guy could possibly be as an enemy.[12] At first Saladin suspected a ruse, but he quickly saw the potential of splitting the Frankish forces. In response therefore to Raymond's approach, he released a number of Raymond's knights whom he was holding.

Then in the winter of 1186, with the truce running out, Reynald of Chatillon attacked a caravan travelling from Cairo to Damascus. Contrary to what has over the years been believed, Saladin's sister was not on the caravan. Nevertheless Reynald's act was shocking, and Saladin immediately protested to Guy about this contravention of the truce. Saladin demanded that all prisoners be released and all property returned. Guy appealed to Reynald to make restitution, but Reynald refused to do so, claiming that he was king in his lands in the same way that Guy was king in his, and that he had no truce with Saladin. The fact was that, at the time when the Christians were least able to combat the Muslims, Reynald chose to break the truce.

On the face of it his action appears senseless and deliberately provocative, and Reynald is often portrayed as the *enfant terrible* in the unfolding drama, but the truth is more nuanced and a degree of political sophistication needs to be added to Reynald's actions.[13] It had become increasingly clear that Saladin had no intention of renewing the truce, which was to expire in Easter 1187. He had returned from his illness determined to fight – as he had vowed to al-Qadi al-Fadil – and now an army was slowly mustering with forces from Egypt, Syria, the Euphrates and the Tigris. No Muslim leader in living memory had gathered such a large force. Of this fact Reynald was undoubtedly aware, and was tempted to strike first. He may even have supposed that Saladin was using the peace to move troops through Frankish territory and have considered this a breach of the truce.[14] Undoubtedly the seizure of the caravan shocked Saladin, but the reality was that war was about to be resumed – and both parties understood this. In any case, it was Raymond of Tripoli who had agreed the truce with Saladin, and Reynald detested him and considered him a traitor. Nor did Reynald view the breaking of the truce as an act of insubordination towards the ruler of Jerusalem,[15] for he was already in the process of building a state within a state and would eventually have pressed for independence from the rule of Jerusalem, like Tripoli or Antioch.

Despite Reynald's provocation, Saladin did not break the truce. It was now the Muslim month of Muharram, when the pilgrims would be returning from Mecca, and in March 1187 Saladin took a detachment of troops to Bosra to prevent Reynald attacking another caravan on which his sister, who had completed the pilgrimage, was travelling. At the same time, he awaited the arrival of the Egyptian forces. With the truce about to expire, and as it became clear that Saladin had no intention of renewing it, Guy summoned his nobles to determine what the response should be. Those present urged him that peace with Raymond of Tripoli was critical, since the kingdom could not afford to be divided. At once a delegation set off, but by the time it had departed Jerusalem, the truce had ended and Saladin declared war. This time he was determined to fight, 'for affairs do not run according to human desire, nor do we know how much is left of our lives'.

Chapter 11

Victory at Hattin

It is you who gave him to drink.

Saladin

It was Balian of Ibelin who was the most vociferous in arguing that the dispute between the king and Raymond of Tripoli needed urgently to come to an end, for the sake of the kingdom. He even offered to head a delegation which would travel to Tiberias where Raymond was staying with his wife, Eschiva, to seek a settlement. Guy agreed to this proposal and Balian set off at once. He was joined by Gerard of Ridefort, the master of the Templars, and Roger of Moulins, master of the Hospitallers. In the meantime Raymond was facing a delicate situation, for Saladin's son al-Afdal asked permission to carry out a reconnaissance mission across his lands and Raymond's agreement with Saladin left him in no position to refuse. Wisely, he limited al-Afdal's movements and it was agreed that the Muslim party – led by Keukburi, with whom rode Qaymaz al-Najmi, at the head of a squadron from Damascus – would cross the river Jordan after sunrise and leave before sunset. Of Keukburi we shall speak more later, for he was destined to play an important role in Saladin's greatest victory, but we cannot pass over Qaymaz al Najmi's name without comment. His name reveals his Turkish origin but also informs us that he was a freed slave – a mamluk – and his affiliation al-Najmi tells us that he had been purchased, freed and employed by Saladin's father, Najm al-Din Ayyub. Al-Najmi was the leader

of the mamluks based in Damascus and he headed a cavalry 500 strong. He was a military man *par excellence*; he had distinguished himself in battle and had only reluctantly accepted civil administration. Still anxious to avoid any clashes, Raymond then sent out the word that the Muslim forces were simply passing through his territory and should be neither approached nor challenged. When news reached him of a royal delegation approaching Tiberias headed by Balian, he hastily summoned messengers to inform them of the situation. Believing that he had done all that he could do and that all precautions had been taken, he stood at the battlements of Tiberias as dawn broke and watched as the Muslim force, headed by Keukburi, rode by.

However, Raymond had not accounted for the hot-headedness of the master of the Templars, for no sooner did Gerard hear that a Muslim force was crossing Christian land than he felt honour-bound to attack it. It was a rash act and a stubborn one; when James of Mailly attempted to persuade him of the suicidal nature of such an attack, Gerard mocked him and retorted, 'You love your blond head too much to lose it'. Spoken to a knight, this inflammatory jibe was a challenge to his bravery. Stung into action, James and the crusaders now charged, and initially caught the Muslim forces unprepared. But when Keukburi and Qaymaz al-Najmi led a counter-charge with spear and sword the result was a massacre of the Christians. All the Templars were killed, including the Hospitaller Roger; all, that is, except Gerard and two others, who managed to escape. The first that Raymond heard of what had happened was when he once again came to his battlement at sunset to watch the Muslim forces leave his territory, only to be confronted by the chilling sight of the Muslims crossing the river with the heads of the Templars hung like trophies on their lances. Even in the dusk, the blond hair of James of Mailly was visible. It is worth nothing to note here the discipline of the Muslim forces; it is a tribute to Keukburi, who was the senior military commander, that he was able to maintain rigour after a military victory, even when the smell of blood hung in the air, and that his men caused no damage to the land and left Raymond's territory as promised. The disaster and massacre reconciled Raymond with Guy, and Raymond broke off his treaty with Saladin. But the reconciliation between the count of Tripoli and the king of Jerusalem could hardly be described as deep, for bitter hatreds remained and Reynald of Chatillon did not forgive Raymond for his perceived treachery. Nor could Raymond's reconciliation make up for the loss of the Templars, which weakened the Christian army.

Gerard of Ridefort wrote to the Pope to inform him of the disaster, but by the time his message had reached Europe a greater disaster was to befall. Faced by an increasingly perilous situation, Guy sent out an *arrière ban* at the end of May, which summoned to arms all able-bodied Christian men.

Saladin gathers his army

In the meantime Saladin was gathering his army – and it was a formidable sight. From the east of the Euphrates came the troops of Iraq; from Damascus came forces headed by Qaymaz al-Najmi; from Aleppo rode Badr al-Din Dildrim at the head of his army. Taqi ul-Din had just concluded a truce with Bohemond III of Antioch and this had liberated him to ride south with his men. The forces of Mosul were led by none other than Fakhr al-Din al-Zafarani, now firmly back in the Saladin camp. Men also poured in from Sinjar, Nisbin, Amid, Irbil and Diyar Bakr. When all those forces had gathered, they were further strengthened by those that arrived from Egypt. It was the largest and most powerful Muslim army ever assembled by a leader, and it was composed of different races speaking a variety of languages: Arabs, Bedouins, Kurds, Turks, Persians and Egyptians. Saladin boasted that on its march its dust darkened the sun. The army was estimated to be at least 30,000,[1] at least twice if not three times the size of Guy's army. At the head of the right wing was Taqi ul-Din, Saladin's nephew, and a man known for his tremendous physical courage. It was Taqi ul-Din who, during the defeat at Mont Gisard, had sent his son to charge Baldwin's army, and when his son had returned had ordered to him to charge again, only to be slain. Now Saladin entrusted his nephew with perhaps the most difficult task, which was to command the right wing of his army, since in military tactics it was often this wing which took the offensive while the left wing acted in a defensive manner.

In fact the person commanding Saladin's left wing was no less formidable, for it was none other than Keukburi, who was married to Saladin's sister. Keukburi – 'blue wolf' in Turkish – was a son of the governor of Irbil, who had been a loyal servant of the Zengids. Keukburi had led the right wing of the Aleppan–Mosuli forces which had been defeated by Saladin at Tell al-Sultan, but he had shifted sides and it was he who had encouraged Saladin to cross the Euphrates. There was no doubting his military prowess – Imad al-Din al-Isfahani described him as a lion who heads straight for the target – but Keukburi was also a devoted patron of learning and the builder of many madrasas and sufi hospices in Irbil. And Saladin's army was strengthened not just by military succour, for riding alongside him were some of the leading religious scholars and madrasa professors. There could be no greater symbol of the alliance between the religious scholars and the military than the sight of the Shafii Saladin riding at the head of his army accompanied by Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama, the Hanbali legist and student of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. There had been a time when the Shafiis and the Hanbalis had mocked and fought each other in the streets of Baghdad, but now the soldier and the scholar rode side by side. And as Saladin's army marched, Muwaffaq al-Din's nephew, Abd al-Ghani, stood aside and made a public reading of the *The Profession of Faith*, a work of the Hanbalite scholar Ibn Batta.[2] It was the same work that was read out when Shirkuh and Saladin rode on their Egyptian campaign.

For Saladin, however, the size of the army meant that he needed to fight a decisive battle, for he was not certain that he could assemble such a force again, and therein lay the challenge. He had told Ibn Shaddad, 'If I were to die, it is very unlikely that these soldiers would ever come together again'. And these words were not meant to be immodest. Rather they were a realisation of the dogged effort which had been involved to bring together such a large army, and the fragility and ease with which it could disperse. Saladin knew that as long as Guy held his position at Saffuriya, with its well-watered gardens, he could continue to defy him until Saladin's army dispersed. In order to achieve victory Saladin needed to bring Guy's army out into the parched lands of Galilee, between the coast and Lake Tiberias, across the waterless plain and then defeat it. For Guy to be victorious, he simply had to hold firm.

On 26 June 1187 Saladin set out, and after two days marching the army made camp at al-Qahwani, a marshy area between Lake Tiberias and the rivers Jordan and Yarmuk. Saladin then climbed westwards from the Jordan to Kafr Sabt, from where he could threaten both Saffuriyya, where Guy held his army in a defensive position, and Tiberias. It seemed that Saladin was determined to fight and on 1 July he challenged the Franks, but Guy refused to take the bait, leaving Saladin with no choice but to return to Kafr Sabt. It was clear that for a battle to take place Saladin needed to force the Franks out into the open; he now split his army and on 2 July attacked Tiberias. King Guy's actions on the eve of the battle of Hattin and his

reaction to Saladin's attack on Tiberias are well known, but their interpretation has continued to occupy historians. The traditional account relates how Saladin, in order to force the Christian army to leave Saffuriya, had set a trap which the chivalrous knights found hard to resist. Saladin decided that he would lay siege to Tiberias, where Raymond's wife was based, in the hope that the Christians would advance to the aid of a damsel in distress and fall into his trap. Leaving Taqi ul-Din and Keukburi in charge of the mass of the army, Saladin personally led the attack on Tiberias. The initial onslaught was successful, including the collapse of one of the city towers. Rapidly a breach was made and the Muslim forces poured into the city. Raymond's wife, Eschiva, took refuge in the citadel and sent an urgent appeal to her husband, who was with Guy at Saffuriya. Saladin was aware that Guy's scouts were watching the attack on Tiberias from the hills and it was his intention to allow the news to reach Guy. One of the fundamental laws of the kingdom stated that the king had an obligation to go to the aid of one of his vassals if he were threatened by a Muslim attack.[3] This was undoubtedly a noble idea – chivalrous and romantic – but this was not a war fought by troubadours but by battle-hardened veterans like Raymond and Reynald. To march across the Galilean plains in the heat of summer was highly risky, and to confront the Muslim army in open battle went against the most fundamental military strategy on which the Frankish states had been built. Guy was certainly aware of this; four years previously he had shown the discipline that was needed when he had refused to accept Saladin's challenge and had consequently forced him to disband his army in frustration.

Deliberations in the Franks' camp

Guy now assembled his leading counsellors to listen to their opinion. Everyone present, from barons to knights, gathered, for they knew what was at stake. Hundreds of men crowded into and around the king's tent, which was illuminated by torchlight. Above the babble of voices, Raymond's could be heard. He spoke with confidence: Saladin's attack on Tiberias was a bait to trap them but the Christian army should not fall into it, even though it was his own wife who was trapped in the citadel. If Tiberias were to fall, then this would lead to the disbanding of the Muslim armies, who would return to Mosul and Aleppo and Egypt. What falls today can be reconquered

tomorrow. As for his wife's safety, he was not concerned, for such was Saladin's renown for gallantry that he would never harm a woman. But if the entire military strength of the kingdom marched into the waterless plateau that separated Saffuriyah from Tiberias, then they would risk a disaster of enormous magnitude. Raymond's speech was powerful and his voice rose in confidence as he found that others – even those who felt he was a traitor – were listening intently. Silence followed after he had spoken, until Guy announced that Raymond had spoken the truth and that there would be no march to Tiberias. Instead, the army would remain in Saffuriyah until Saladin disbanded his army. There was nothing further to add, and the Franks retired to their tents.

That night Guy of Lusignan changed his mind, and so sealed the fate of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Two men had remained behind in the tent when the rest had slipped off into the night: Reynald of Chatillon and Gerard of Ridefort. Both hated Raymond with a vengeance and were convinced he was a traitor. A few weeks earlier, Gerard had witnessed his Templars being slain by Muslim forces who had ridden through Raymond's lands with his blessing, and he seethed with anger and rage. The traditional accounts relate how the two men bullied Guy and won him over to their argument; why, they asked, was Raymond so confident in leaving his wife as a prisoner with Saladin, unless he was already in league with him? Could Guy not see that Raymond aspired to the throne, and that the best way to do that was to humiliate Guy in the eyes of his own people – showing how the king of Jerusalem was unable to come to the rescue of a city which lay barely 16 kilometres (10 miles) away? In this way historians have argued that a weak and cowardly king was made to change his mind. Except that Guy was not as weak or cowardly as his detractors have made him out to be; he had led an army once and would lead armies again, and when so much was at stake it seems unlikely he would simply bow to the bullying of two men and embark on such a risky campaign, no matter how powerful they were. So why did Guy change his mind? There was one further subject which is often overlooked but which undoubtedly was mentioned late in that fateful night, and to understand this more fully we need to return to Henry II and the fortune he had amassed in the east. We have seen earlier how the patriarch Heraclius had failed to convince Henry to take up the Cross, and although there was a good chance that the king of England would recall his money, Guy persuaded the master of the Templars to open

his part of Henry's eastern account. This was the first time that Henry's money was touched and it was a sensational event, because people had been waiting for it for 15 years on both sides of the sea.[4] The news was bound to reach Henry, and when it did it was expected that his anger would be terrible. To pacify him, Guy ordered that the soldiers hired with English money fight under the English flag. But it was clear to Guy, as it was to Gerard of Ridefort, that Henry's wrath could only be cooled by a spectacular triumph. We will never know what took place in that tent during that fateful night, but when dawn broke, on 3 July 1189, trumpeters were sent throughout the camp to issue new orders: the army was going to march to Tiberias. Drowsy men woke up in confusion, which quickly turned into anger. What could have happened to change the king's mind?

The march to Tiberias

Saladin was at dawn prayers just outside the walls of Tiberias when messengers arrived bearing the news that the Christian army was on the march. The news surprised him, for though he had hoped that Guy would take the bait, he had not expected it. He immediately mounted his horse and rode the 10 kilometres (6 miles) to Kafr Sabt where his army was stationed. There he was greeted by Taqi ul-Din and Keukburi, who confirmed the news: Guy was indeed on the march. They had already sent out light forces to harass the Franks, though not in large enough numbers to prevent them from marching or to suspect that a trap lay ahead. From the high ground of Kafr Sabt Saladin could watch the Christian army on the move. It was in three columns: Raymond of Tripoli was at its head; the king Guy of Lusignan was in the centre, accompanied by the True Cross; and at the rear was Balian of Ibelin, who rode with the most experienced knights and the Templars, for this was the position of greatest danger since it was a common tactic among the Muslims to try to cut off the rearguard from the rest of the army. The formation dictated that the infantry, including the archers and crossbowmen, protect the cavalry, who stood ready to drive back the Muslims with controlled charges. Discipline was imperative as this defensive shield marched. From Kafr Sabt the Christian army appeared as no more than a dust cloud in the distance, but Saladin was in no doubt about the significance of what was occurring. Turning to his two commanders, he declared that today the outcome of the holy war would be decided.

The problem of writing about the battle of Hattin is that we know the outcome. In that sense the tortured prelude appears as an omen for a tragedy which was about to befall the Latin Kingdom. Bad omens and portents were said to have been everywhere – the horses refused to drink before setting out, a crazed Muslim woman was seen by many laying a curse on the Christian army, and so on – but ominous omens are recalled only after the event. The reality was that the Christians did not believe they were going to be defeated. They certainly did not believe their action was suicidal, and it is important to try to understand in the heat of the events that followed what their strategy may have been. By mid-morning the Christian army had been marching for five or six hours, and most of the soldiers were suffering terribly from thirst and exhaustion. They had turned eastwards into Wadi Rummanah and were close to Mount Turan, where there was a vital spring of water. At this stage we begin to understand a bit more about Guy's strategy.[5] The king knew that the Muslim army was holding the high ground, but he also knew that beyond Mount Turan a valley opened up, which could be used as a battlefield. If he could tempt the Muslim army down from the high ground and charge them, he would pin them against the ridge and that would mean that victory would be his. If Saladin did not take up the challenge and come down from the ridge, then Guy would return to the water spring of Turan until either the Muslims descended to fight or their army disbanded. The decision to march was not as suicidal as it may have first appeared, but it was very risky. The stakes could not be higher: Guy had calculated that the day would be decided on the outcome of a battle. In doing so, and in underestimating Saladin's forces, he miscalculated terribly.

From Turan Tiberias was still 14 kilometres (9 miles) away and half the day was gone. Although Guy could not have realised the full extent of Saladin's army, which was gathered on the ridge, by noon he was beginning to sense it, as the attacks on the Christian army became relentless. News reached Raymond, who was leading the vanguard, that the rearguard had been slowed down to crawl. It was clear that the army would not reach Tiberias before nightfall and at this point a decision was made – with Raymond apparently the instigator – that the army should swing left down a track to the springs at Hattin, which lay no more than 6 kilometres (4 miles) away. From there the army could reach Lake Tiberias the next day. This required the army to march down a slope, which, though by no means

challenging, would have made it more difficult to keep in formation. At this stage the army was spread out over at least 2 kilometres (1¼ miles), with the rearguard being subjected to constant attacks by Saladin's left wing under the command of Keukburi.

From the hills to the south Saladin had a clear view of the movements of the Christian army. He immediately spotted the change of direction and he acted to counter the new strategy. It was crucial to try to outflank the Franks and surround them and thereby drive them into the desert and away from the spring, and this task was given to Taqi ul-Din's division. Raymond of Tripoli, who was commanding the vanguard, realised what was happening and urged speed, lest the army be blocked from reaching the spring by Taqi ul-Din, but it was too late. And on that move the battle was decided and the fate of the Latin Kingdom was sealed. Saladin then ordered Keukburi to attack Guy's army and a relentless wave of coloured banners and flashing steel[6] now descended from the slopes. The shrill battlecries, drumbeats and the clanging of cymbals, rattles and gongs were accompanied by the echo of a thousand 'Allahu Akbars'. It was a critical time, for not only did Taqi ul-Din need to prevent Raymond from marching down the slope to Hattin but the right wing had to be strong enough to prevent the Christians from cutting their way out again. At the same time Keukburi was ordered to prevent the Christian army from retreating at any cost. Furiously and frantically the Templars charged at Keukburi, hoping to make a breakthrough, but the left wing held firm. Once the two wings had succeeded in outflanking the Christian army and Saladin was able to hold the ridge with his Egyptian forces, the Franks were surrounded in the open desert with no water. It was a terrible situation; if the Franks were to remain on the waterless plain then not just the army but the kingdom would be lost. Then, to Raymond's great consternation, Guy ordered that the column halt and make camp in this desolate spot. It was the action of an exhausted man who had lost his nerve at a time when strong and forceful action was vital. 'Alas! Alas! Lord God', bemoaned Raymond when the king's command was delivered to him, 'the war is over. We are betrayed to death and the land is lost.' But Guy had little option but to strike camp, since there was a grave danger of the rearguard being cut off and sacrificed. Soon night fell and the darkness hid the two armies from each other.

The night of 3–4 July 1189 was a terrible one for the Christian army and a tense one for the Muslim army. So hemmed in were the Christian forces

that, according to the chroniclers, not even a cat could have passed through the Muslim lines to escape, and so close were the two armies that both sides could hear the other side's conversations. Desolate and urgent prayers to the Christian and Muslim Gods now drifted heavenwards in the dark night, as men from both sides prepared for daylight. Throughout the night the Muslim drums continued to beat and a continuous rain of arrows descended on the Christian camp. 'As the arrows struck them down', so wrote Ibn Shaddad, 'those who had seemed like lions now seemed like hedgehogs.' Then just before dawn a brief silence fell, but only as prelude to the Muslim call to prayer, as the hills echoed with the sound of 'Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar'. That night Saladin was like a man possessed and refused any rest. He understood that his destiny awaited him with the break of dawn, but his cautious nature told him that the battle was far from over and that victory remained elusive. So far, few Frankish knights had perished and he knew that there would come a time during the next day when, confronted with no choice, the knights would charge. If they succeeded in making a breakthrough to the springs of water then they would be safe and his victory incomplete. And so orders were given that next day there should be no cessation in the rain of arrows that descended on the Christian camp, for no sooner would the knights feel the arrows lessening than they would certainly unleash a ferocious and desperate charge and the outcome of that would be uncertain. At the same time, a constant convoy of camels, laden with thousands of goat skins filled with water, made its way from Lake Tiberias into the Muslim camp, for water and the thirst of the Christians was certain to play a huge factor when the sun arose.

As dawn broke on 4 July Saladin remained uncertain as to the tactics of the Christian army. Would they try to retreat to the spring of Turan, or make a dash for Hattin, or would they make a sudden and furious attack on his position to force a way out? As daylight broke, Guy ordered his army to begin its desperate move, and Ibn Shaddad noted that the Christians 'looked like mountains on the march, like seas boiling over, wave upon wave'. Once again Raymond led the vanguard, with the king and the True Cross in the centre, and Balian and the white-robed Templars and black-mantled Hospitallers protecting the fragile rear. Into the blinding light of the rising sun the Christian army marched to its doom. Saladin held back and only some sporadic incursions were made against the rearguard, though he did suffer casualties and one of his most trusted amirs – Muranguras

– was slain. But as the heat of the sun began to take its toll and as the two wings of the Muslim army held firm, several knights, to the horror of the Christians, broke out of the formation and sought sanctuary with the Muslims, prepared to take up the Muslim faith. It was then that Saladin ordered that scrub fires be ignited, for he knew that the westerly winds would blow the smoke and ash into the faces of the Franks, creating further confusion and allowing his horsemen to launch deadly attacks.

At this point the morale of the infantry collapsed, and one by one they began to break away from the column and the formation began to crack. With a unity of purpose that only shared suffering could give them, the exhausted men began to run and stumble in their thousands up the black, rocky slopes of the Horns of Hattin.[7] The king's red tent was now pitched in futility to act as a rallying point for the infantry, who were beyond rallying. Even the bishops carrying the True Cross could not persuade the foot soldiers, for they were calling to men who had abandoned themselves to death.[8] The disintegration of the infantry was crucial, since it was their responsibility to protect the knights. In their absence, the Muslims easily succeeded in killing the knights' horses, thereby rendering them ineffective. The Frankish army broke into three parts, while around the king's tent, besieged and terrified, massed the nobles and knights of the kingdom. At the head of the army Raymond was faced with a hopeless situation. The only recourse, one which he had constantly advocated, was to charge Taqi ul-Din's wing and try to make a breakthrough. It would mean abandoning the king and the True Cross, but the battle was lost and Guy had brought this calamity on his own head. Raymond now desperately ordered his knights to line up for a charge and to take advantage of a downward slope. Saladin's nephew saw clearly what was on Raymond's mind and as the knights charged he ordered his forces to open their ranks and allow them to sweep through. As the riders passed, the archers rained volleys of arrows on them, and then when they had passed, Taqi ul-Din once again closed ranks. Raymond found himself on the outside of the battle, and with tired horses and exhausted men he could not hope to fight his way back. In any case there was nothing he could now do to alter the result of the battle. And so Raymond rode to the castle of Safad in the hills to the north. His escape was accompanied by accusations of cowardice and treachery, but it is hard to see what else he could have done. After all, he had done all he could to avert

this disaster. A few weeks later Raymond died in Tripoli – and some said that he died from shame.

The capture of the True Cross

Then, when all seemed lost, the knights of the Frankish army began to fight with the desperation of martyrs. While the infantry huddled on the hillsides, the knights around Guy chose to charge at Saladin himself, hoping to slay him. Not once but twice tremendous charges were made, which carried the fighting almost to Saladin's tent. Saladin's son al-Afdal and Ibn Shaddad were accompanying him that day, and al-Afdal recorded his father's anxiety at the knight's charge: 'I looked at him and saw that he had turned ashen pale in distress and had grasped his beard'. The knights were driven back and al-Afdal cried out in joy, 'We have beaten them', only to be hushed by his father. 'We have not beaten them until that tent falls', Saladin said, pointing to the red tent of the king. No sooner had Saladin spoken than the ropes of the king's tent were cut and it collapsed, and Saladin knew that the battle was over and that victory was his. At once he dismounted from his horse and prostrated himself, kissing the ground in thanks to his Lord. At the same time Guy of Lusignan, overwhelmed by the Muslim forces pouring around his tent, threw his sword aside, covered his head with his arms and sank to his knees in despair. In the meantime a fierce battle, led by Taqi ul-Din, raged around the relic of the True Cross, which was protected by the Bishops of Acre and Lydda. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place as arrows were abandoned in favour of swords, and though the Bishop of Acre was slain as he protected the Cross, his colleague, the Bishop of Lydda, did not hesitate to seize a sword and fight with the fierce abandon of a skilled warrior. It was magnificent and moving, but hopeless and futile. One by one the warriors protecting the relic fell by the side as the Muslim forces pressed forward, and it was none other than Saladin's nephew who burst through the Christian defence and seized the Cross, holding it aloft as joyous ululations of Muslim chants filled the air.

The overwhelming victory at the battle of Hattin has elevated Saladin to the ranks of the great military leaders of history. To an extent this is misleading, since though the victory was certainly achieved on the battlefield, Saladin's greatness lay elsewhere. A careful study of the events of those

fateful days reveal a considerable amount about his character and motivations. It has been argued by historians – and not without an element of truth – that Guy lost the battle of Hattin rather than that Saladin won it, and certainly Guy made two fatal mistakes. The first one was obvious: he chose to march his army from a defensive and secure position to Tiberias. We have touched briefly and speculated on why he changed his mind on that fateful night, but we have also stressed that marching the army to Tiberias – admittedly in inclement weather – did not automatically signal its doom. Certainly Guy had handed Saladin an advantage, but the battle was at that stage far from being won or lost. It should also be noted that Guy's decision to march was precisely because Saladin attacked Tiberias and had accordingly set a trap for him, even if Saladin's surprise when he was informed that Guy was marching is proof that he was not expecting him to take the bait. The second error made by Guy was far more serious, and that was that he fundamentally underestimated the size of Saladin's army. The frustrating years of diplomacy in Aleppo and Mosul had finally paid off and the army which Saladin had gathered came from all corners of the Muslim world. Perhaps Guy was less informed of what was happening in Saladin's camp than Saladin was of the internal schisms among the Christian knights, but it is hard to see what he could have done even then. In any case, Saladin's greatest achievement was that he succeeded in gathering together the greatest Muslim army since the Abbasid times – and one that was held together by the force of his personality. There was still a battle to be fought, of course, but it was clear that Saladin's years in the wilderness had not been spent in vain. But even then, Guy's two errors did not hand Saladin victory. Although a battle could be lost, it also needed to be won.

From the moment that the Christian army set off on its march to Tiberias, Saladin unleashed the force of his army against the Franks. So fierce were the attacks led by Keukburi that the Christian rearguard was slowed down to such a slow pace that there was a real danger that Raymond and Guy would leave it behind. As long as the infantry protected the knights from the Muslim attacks then the Christian army could move relatively unhindered, but the collapse of the morale of the infantry and the subsequent collapse and desertions were of course partly due to the extreme heat and thirst of the men, but also largely to the incessant and ferocious nature of the Muslim attacks. If to slow the army down was Saladin's first objective, then his second one was to prevent it from reaching the spring of Hattin. As soon as Saladin saw that Raymond had changed direction and was making for Hattin, he ordered Taqi ul-Din to block him, and achieving this objective brought the first act of the war to an end as night fell. So far the battle had gone according to plan, but one imagines that the night of 4 July was a long one since Saladin knew that victory was far from assured. He would have known that the Christians were fighting a holy war, which was just as precious to them as his jihad was to him. Thus when dawn broke an iron discipline would be required to ensure that that which had been gained would not be lost. And indeed the Christian army tested the resolve of the Muslims to the full; against Keukburi on the left wing, against Taqi ul-Din on the right, and even against Saladin in the centre. But all three held firm and, that day, victory belonged to Saladin. One can certainly argue that Guy's errors were crucial to the outcome at Hattin, but at the same time Saladin got his enemies to fight where he wanted, when he wanted and how he wanted,[9] and that, in itself, was a tremendous achievement.

As Saladin slowly rode to camp, the impact of what had been achieved began to sink in. The devastated Christian survivors were rounded up as prisoners and Saladin ordered that they be sent off to Damascus. There were so many prisoners that Ibn Shaddad witnessed the sight of a Muslim man walking and dragging behind him a tent rope from which he had tied the hands of 30 Frankish prisoners who sullenly followed him. Such was the scale of the victory that the price of a prisoner fell to dinars, and it was told that a prisoner in Damascus was sold for a shoe. As for the Cross, it was fixed upside down and carried by Ibn Abi Asrun – who had once as a young man befriended Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani in Baghdad – victoriously into Damascus. The list of noblemen who had been taken prisoner was impressive. There was the king of course, but also his brothers, the Marquess William of Montferrat, Reynald of Chatillon, Joscelin of Courtenay, Humphrey of Toron, the master of the Templars Gerard of Ridefort, the Bishop of Lydda, the master of the Hospitallers, and hundreds of men of lesser rank and distinction.[10] It would be hard to exaggerate the scale of the victory, for in one day – terrible for the Christians, glorious for the Muslims – the Frankish army and with it the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem had been devastated. Strict instructions were then issued that all Templars and Hospitallers were to be taken aside and ransoms paid for those who had captured them, for a different fate awaited them.

Saladin slays Reynald of Chatillon

To Saladin's tent the king Guy and Reynald of Chatillon were brought. To Guy, Saladin maintained his famed magnanimity and offered him a goblet of iced water to quench his thirst. But when the king passed the goblet to Reynald, Saladin frowned and told the king – through an interpreter – 'It is you who gave him to drink'. The implication was clear, for it was a universally accepted tradition among the Muslims that if a captive was given food or drink then his life was safe. Saladin then reproached Reynald for his past actions and for his attack on the caravan, but Reynald remained defiant, claiming that he did only what princes do. Saladin remained passive, his face expressionless, and for a few moments the men sat in silence. Saladin then stood up and left the tent. When he returned, Guy was taken into an antechamber and Reynald brought into Saladin's presence. This time Saladin was curt and he simply offered Reynald the option of converting to Islam. It was an option which of course he knew Reynald would never accept, but legally Saladin had to offer it. No sooner had Reynald refused it did Saladin draw his sword and strike him around the neck. The blow felled Reynald but did not kill him, and a guard stepped forward and cut his head off. The body was then dragged out of the tent and past Guy, who became ashen faced and began to shake, for he feared that he too would be slain. Saladin, however, quickly emerged and reassured Guy that his life was safe. 'Kings do not kill kings', he told him, 'but he had transgressed his limits.' Saladin had fulfilled his vow to his old friend al-Qadi al-Fadil.

Meanwhile the Templars and the Hospitallers, whom Saladin detested, had been gathered. 'I wish to purify the land of these two monstrous orders', Saladin had once vowed, and he was true to his word. He knew that the prisoners would disdain ransom and that if released would fight him again, for that was what they had vowed. And so he ordered that they should all be gathered and executed in one session. Intriguingly, those who were to carry out the executions were not Saladin's soldiers but the religious clerics and sufis. This seems a perplexing command. Perhaps Saladin intended it to be a symbolic act; to allow the sufis to participate in the shedding of infidel blood and thereby symbolically cement the alliance between the religious clerics and the men of the sword. Nevertheless it is hard to explain the motives behind Saladin's decision that day. No one was killed

without first being offered a chance to convert to Islam, and a few accepted this offer. It is interesting to note that those who did accept went on to live among the Muslims and practise their faith sincerely. The rest were handed to the sufis and were slaughtered to a man. On that dark day for the Christians, 230 Templar knights were put to the sword.

Chapter 12

The Return of Jerusalem

The sultan sat with his face gleaming with happiness.
Imad al-Din al-Isfahani

The kingdom of Jerusalem was destroyed in one battle, and what had endured for 90 years vanished within 30 days. The victory at Hattin secured Saladin's fame in history but it did not afford him security at home, for he knew that once the news of the calamity reached Europe there would be a swift and terrible response. But now, when speed was what mattered most, Saladin's actions lacked urgency and there was a good reason for that – the Hattin campaign had exhausted him. His health had never recovered fully after his serious illness, and the burden of responsibility which weighed heavily on his shoulders – though was certainly lifted by his outstanding triumph – had taken its toll. For the time being Saladin basked in his triumph. The Latin Kingdom had been crippled and could no longer put an army into the field, and Guy had stripped the garrisons to equip his army, leaving his cities defenceless. The choice that lay ahead of Saladin was which cities he should capture first. Should it be the coastal cities such as Acre, Sidon and Tyre, where the Christians were largely concentrated and through which any relief from Europe would have to come? Or should he turn inland and seize the ungarrisoned castles and the ultimate prize, Jerusalem?

From Hattin, Saladin rode to Acre, the 'Constantinople of Syria'. As a symbolic gesture, he was accompanied by the amir of Medina. The Muslims were not expecting any opposition and Saladin was initially astonished when he saw the walls manned by Christian soldiers with banners bravely fluttering

in the breeze. It was a defiant gesture but a hollow one, for no sooner had the Muslim forces been drawn up for battle than the gates of the city opened and representatives emerged to discuss the terms of surrender. As usual, Saladin was generous to those around him, and so his son al-Afdal was given the town and its estates, his old companion Isa al-Hakkari took the property of the Templars, while Taqi ul-Din was given the sugar refinery. To public acclaim Saladin liberated 400 Muslim slaves from Acre and worshipped in the city's mosque, which for the previous 90 years had been used as a church. While his generosity at Acre was typical, it was Imad al-Din al-Isfahani who pointed out to him that had the wealth of Acre been kept in a treasury instead of being given away, it would have financed all his campaigns. But frugality was never in Saladin's character, even when generosity almost bankrupted his empire. The sources constantly portray the amazement of his officers that the personal acquisitions – universally acknowledged as the first object of any amir, including those of his own house – were of no interest to him.[1] We even read that his treasurers kept secret funds which they did not tell him about, for fear that he would give the money away.

The collapse of the Latin Kingdom

In the meantime there was a kingdom to conquer and Saladin decided to divide his army. Normally his cautious nature made him reluctant to give independent command: 'I never send out any of my companions or my family on an expedition without being fearful for them'. But now there was no danger from a Christian army and he decided to dispatch his commanders, 'like ants covering the whole face of the country from Tyre to Jerusalem', to the corners of the kingdom. Nazareth fell to Keukburi, and Nablus to Husam al-Din. Badr al-Din Dildrim took Haifa, Arsuf and Caesarea, while al-Adil took Jaffa. Saladin then dispatched Taqi ul-Din, his most capable commander, to seize Tyre and Tibnin, and it was there that Saladin made the mistake which would return to haunt him. Taqi ul-Din faced severe resistance at Tibnin and he was forced to appeal to Saladin for aid. While the siege was enduring, the Christian refugees from Hattin were flooding into Tyre – and it was Tyre not Tibnin which should have been the Muslim's target, for it offered the vital strategic harbour which Saladin needed to seize to prevent aid pouring in from Europe. Even when Tibnin

fell, Saladin showed his customary leniency, allowing the Christians five days to collect their possessions and then allowing them to march to Tyre.

Tyre was the key, but its capture would require a long siege and Saladin ignored it, preferring to march northwards to Sidon and Beirut, which were harder to defend and which fell easily. At Beirut Imad al-Din had fallen ill and so, when the city had surrendered, Saladin, believing that anyone who carried a pen was a scribe, requested that the terms of surrender be noted in a document, only to find out that no one was capable of doing so to his satisfaction. Imad al-Din noted – not without pride – that he had to dictate it from his sick-bed. Saladin then turned south and once again passed Tyre, but made no effort to besiege it. Ibn Shaddad wrote that the soldiers were tired of fighting and that every man was taking what he could for himself. It was then that Saladin received a letter from his brother in Egypt, in which al-Adil urged him to turn towards the ultimate prize: Jerusalem. In later life al-Adil recalled the words that he had written to his brother:

> *One of the arguments that I advanced when I was speaking to Saladin and urging him to take the opportunity of capturing Jerusalem was this: I pointed out that he was liable to attacks of colic and I said: 'If you die of an attack tonight, Jerusalem will stay in the hands of the Franks'.*

The turning towards Jerusalem was symbolic. Had Tyre fallen, as surely it would have if Saladin had unleashed his forces on it, then the European crusaders would have struggled to gain a foothold in the region from which to launch the Third Crusade. It was a strategic mistake, as Saladin had left a door unlocked through which Richard, the deadliest of his enemies, made an entrance unchallenged.[2] The military head said Tyre, but the pious heart whispered Jerusalem. From the time of Nur al-Din, the Muslims had turned their gaze, with increasing intensity, towards Jerusalem. Nur al-Din had built his whole propaganda around Jerusalem and had symbolically constructed a pulpit ready to find its rightful place in the Aqsa mosque. From the moment of Nur al-Din's death, Saladin claimed to be his spiritual heir and his ideological protégé, and Jerusalem became the focus of his campaign. It was a campaign in which the religious classes participated actively and with increasing vigour. In the pulpits and the madrasas and the marketplaces, the message was always the same: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. It may not have been strategically important but that did not matter, for Jerusalem was everything. The Holy City simply had to be

taken.[3] And the capture of Jerusalem was necessary for Saladin, for it was proof of his sincerity and vindication of his actions. From 1174 he had unceasingly written to the caliph and claimed to be the champion of the holy war and he never deviated from that message – or rather his two brilliant spin-doctors Imad al-Din al-Isfahani and al-Qadi al-Fadil never allowed him to deviate. The message itself was clear: he was fighting the holy war and, given the forces he required, he would recapture Jerusalem for the Muslims. Even during the disproportionate period of time which he spent fighting Aleppo and Mosul, the message never altered. And now he had delivered the highest prize possible. It was he who had restored Sunni orthodoxy to Egypt and had effectively sealed the fate of the Latin Kingdom as a result. Now it was he who would restore Sunni orthodoxy to Jerusalem.

Although Saladin would not have sensed it directly, the restoration of Jerusalem into Muslim hands was the culmination not only of his tireless endeavours and Nur al-Din's incessant propaganda, but also of the Sunni Revival, which had been born in a different city in a different time. Saladin's admirable qualities and the cult of personality that has grown around him has tended to obscure this fundamental point, but if this book began in Baghdad and with Nizam ul-Mulk, it was because without the ideas associated with the invigorated Sunni orthodoxy, Saladin would never have triumphed. Once those ideas began to take their natural course, Saladin – barring historical accidents – could not but triumph. The theological genius of al-Ghazali was that he understood the urgent need for an inwardly ecumenical Islam which allowed Muslims from different schools of law and from different spiritual inclinations – mystics and rationalists, sufis and Mutazilis – to adhere to the same orthodoxy. The image of Saladin, a military Shafii Kurd, riding into the Hattin campaign with Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama, a Palestinian Hanbali jurist, is a striking one. And the rapprochment was not just between the Sunnis, for there were sincere attempts to bring the Twelve Shiites into the fold. It is worth noting that the Shiites of Aleppo and northern Syria, with whom Nur al-Din had struggled on several occasions, assisted Saladin during his campaigns against the Franks. And as mentioned earlier, the attempt at a Sunni–Shiite understanding had been the cornerstone of Ibn Hubayra, who had served two Abbasid caliphs. Although Ibn Hubayra and Saladin never met, Abd al-Latif Baghdadi writes that when he was in Damascus in 1190, he came across Ibn Hubayra's son

who was in the service of Saladin. The political genius of Nizam ul-Mulk was that he created the madrasa – or transformed it, to be precise – as a vehicle which carried this message of rapprochement across the Islamic world and into the cities and towns. But if the message of the Sunni Revival was ecumenical from within, it was exoterically intransigent, and though it was initially born to combat the Ismaili heresy, fate dictated that the ideas should reach Syria at the same time as the crusaders. The result was the counter-crusade.

Of course, for the ideas of the Sunni orthodoxy to flourish they demanded a sincere adherence to its principles, and the incredible spread of madrasas – the symbol of this invigorated Sunnism – was a testimony of the sincerity. What is remarkable about this period is how everyone participated in building madrasas as an affirmation of their piety, from military men like Shirkuh who had no time for the theological debates which were conducted within, to the disproportionate number of women patrons who would never even have entered the madrasas which they patronised. Saladin himself, of course, participated actively in this revival and never more so than by his endeavours in Egypt. Intellectually he may not have had the vision to see the whole picture, but though he was a simple man, he certainly was not a simpleton. It can fairly be said that his efforts arose out of the simplicity of his character, which allowed him to adhere unquestioningly to his orthodoxy. This simplicity, complemented by a natural piety and humility, would have made him sense that he was being pulled by a powerful tide.

Before he could leave the coast and head inland towards Jerusalem, Saladin had to settle the question of Ascalon. He turned to his most prized prisoner and offered Guy his freedom if he could persuade the garrison of Ascalon to surrender. Guy agreed to this, but when he tried to plead with the garrison he was mocked by its people and labelled a coward. It was a public humiliation for Guy, and he was kept as prisoner for a further year in Nablus. In the meantime, seeing that Ascalon would not surrender peacefully, Saladin stormed the city and captured it. The news of the fall of Ascalon would have been of particular poignancy to al-Qadi al-Fadil as it was his native city. News soon arrived that Gaza and Darum had surrendered, and that meant that the coast belonged to Saladin. The coast, that is, with the exception of Tyre. In the meantime, while Saladin mopped up the crusader strongholds in Palestine, Jerusalem was preparing for the inevitable end game. The city was suffering from an acute shortage of food, especially

since the battle of Hattin had occurred at harvest time and the crops had not been gathered. The shortage of food became more acute as refugees poured into Jerusalem from most of the areas surrounding it: the population of the city doubled from 30,000 to 60,000.

It was largely during this period that Saladin's actions won him the admiration of friend and foe, and tales of these actions were told and retold until they became legendary. We noted above how, had his wealth been better managed, he would have saved himself severe financial hardships, but it was not simply in matters of money that Saladin was generous, and never more so than when he received a request from Balian of Ibelin. Balian had fled the battlefield of Hattin with one concern: to ensure the safety of his wife, Queen Maria Comnena, who had once been married to the great Amalric, and who had fled to Jerusalem with her children. Balian knew that Jerusalem would inevitably fall to Saladin and believed that the only safe refuge for the Christians was Tyre. The question was, how could he possibly fetch his wife from Jerusalem and escort her to safety? Such was Saladin's reputation that Balian did not hesitate to petition him and request a safe conduct to Jerusalem so that he could fetch his wife. It was an extraordinary request, but Saladin lived up to his reputation and agreed, stipulating that Balian should spend only one night in Jerusalem and should never again take up arms against him. Balian vowed that this should be the case and was granted safe passage. In Jerusalem, however, Balian came across a hysterical city suffering a nervous breakdown. At once – though his intention was to enter the city anonymously – he was recognised and escorted to the patriarch Heraclius, who had once travelled to England to petition Henry II in vain to take up the Cross. Heraclius insisted that Balian defend the city against Saladin, and when Balian told him about the oath he had made to Saladin, the patriarch would not be moved: 'An oath to an infidel was not an oath' he declared. But Balian knew that there was more honour in Saladin than in the patriarch of Jerusalem. It was an impossible situation for him; vows were not made to be broken without losing honour, but the people of Jerusalem refused to let him leave the city and clung on to him. He now sent an urgent message to Saladin outlining his dilemma, and Saladin not only agreed to release Balian from his oath, but personally guaranteed safe passage for his wife and her children to Tyre. And since the journey was reasonably tiring, Saladin entertained her in his tent and gave the children garments and jewels as parting gifts.

Saladin besieges Jerusalem

The time had come to take Jerusalem. Astrologers had once informed Saladin that the stars foretold he would enter Jerusalem but that he would lose one eye, but Saladin was dismissive and merely responded, 'I would not mind losing my sight if I took the city'. But now, as the city appeared ready to fall, it was ironically Balian of Ibelin who stood in his way. As the highest ranking lord remaining in Jerusalem, Balian was seen by the Muslims as holding a rank 'more or less equal to that of a king'. In Jerusalem Balian had discovered that there were fewer than 14 knights in the whole city, and he had to create 60 new knights, some barely 16 years old. Any food or money available was stored in anticipation of the inevitable siege which commenced, with the arrival of Saladin's army outside the walls of Jerusalem, on 20 September. It was Yusuf Batit, a member of the Eastern Orthodox clergy who mediated between Saladin and Balian. Saladin made it clear that he preferred to take the city without bloodshed, but those inside remained defiant and refused to surrender, vowing to destroy the city and slay the 5,000 Muslims prisoners held in the city rather than see it handed over peacefully. Thus the siege began. For a week Saladin's army, facing the Tower of David and the Damascus Gate, pelted the ramparts with arrows, catapults and mangonels. Siege engines were rolled up to the walls, but were pushed back each time. Then, on 26 September, Saladin moved his camp to a different part of the city – to the Mount of Olives, where there was no major gate from which the crusaders could counter-attack. Three days later Muslim miners succeeded in collapsing part of a wall and a breach was made, which the outnumbered Christians were unable to defend. Inside the city itself there was great despair as the people were gripped by panic as they saw the Muslim banners planted on the city walls.

At the end of September Balian rode out with an embassy to meet with Saladin. Balian was now prepared to accept the surrender, which he had initially refused, but Saladin was reluctant. Eventually it was agreed that the city would surrender and its population be regarded as prisoners of war. This meant that they could ransom themselves. The ransom was set at 10 dinars for a man, 5 dinars for a woman and 1 dinar for a child. Forty days were then set for the Christian population to raise the ransom, after which any who did not pay were enslaved. But when the 40 days had passed, 1,000 of those who could not afford to pay were released by Saladin's amirs. Most

notably al-Adil and Keukburi and Saladin himself released all old people who were unable to meet the ransom. It was an act of tremendous generosity and it was for such actions during the fall of Jerusalem that Saladin won the admiration of the Christians and a deserved place in history. Human nature being what it is, there were a few who took advantage of the generous terms Saladin had imposed, and none more so than the patriarch Heraclius. Having paid 15 dinars for himself and his mistress, he then proceeded to load wagons full of gold chalices, plates and carpets and drive them out of the city. It was scandalous behaviour especially since these treasures could have ransomed the 15,000 Christians who were eventually enslaved, but when Saladin's outraged amirs complained of his behaviour, Saladin waved them away. 'I prefer to make them obey the letter of the treaty', he replied, 'so that they are unable to accuse the believers of breaking their word.' Later, he admitted in private how shocked he was by the actions of this 'unholy man'. From the moment he slipped away from Jeruslaem, laden with gold, we hear no more of Heraclius. 'He lived viciously', a Christian writer summed up his life, 'and died obscurely.'

No greater contrast could there have been between the occupation of Jerusalem by the Muslim in October 1187 and that of the First Crusade in 1099, when the streets flowed with Muslim and Jewish blood. As the three columns of Christians left Jerusalem, one led by Balian himself and the other two organised by Templars and Hospitallers, Saladin posted his own soldiers throughout the city to ensure that there was no looting or pillage. In addition he ensured that the columns were protected by the Muslims from the rapacity of the Bedouin. Of the 220,000 dinars raised by the ransoms of Jerusalem, Saladin kept nothing. A number of native Christians requested Saladin's permission to remain in Jerusalem and he agreed on the condition that they paid the jizya tax, which was imposed on non-Muslims. In return for paying the tax, he allowed them to pray freely in their churches. Christian affairs were handed over to the Byzantine patriarch.

The triumphant entry into Jerusalem

With increasing excitement and anticipation, Muslims gathered in the streets to witness Saladin's ceremonial entry into Jerusalem. Ibn Shaddad noted that Muslims had flocked from everywhere – in his words every

famous person in Egypt and Syria was there – to witness Saladin's triumphant entry and the restoration of Jerusalem to the Islamic fold. Scholars and sufis, poets and jurists, civilians and military all lined the streets and all eyes were on Saladin. But Saladin, true to his nature, was patient and chose not to enter the city until the time was auspicious. And so it was not until 27 Rajab 583 (2 October 1187), the anniversary of the Night Journey to the Heavens, that he entered Jerusalem. The powerful symbolism of such a date was of course deliberately chosen to make a dramatic impact. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, who accompanied Saladin into Jerusalem, noted that the most urgent task was to restore the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque into a state fit for Islamic worship. However, as Hillenbrand points out, the actions now taken by Saladin were not mere ceremonies of re-appropriation of Muslim religious buildings; these centres of Islamic sanctity needed to be cleansed and purified of Frankish pollution,[4] and an inscription was carved on the Dome of the Rock itself which declared, 'Saladin has purified this sacred house from the polytheists'. At once the Muslims got to work in preparation for the approaching Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa mosque, the first ones to be held in 88 years. The task proved harder than was initially thought, as first they had to demolish many structures that the Franks had built. Imad al-Din stated that the Templars had built some residences to the west of the mosque, which they had equipped with grain storage and latrines, and part of the mosque had been incorporated into the buildings. Saladin had these structures removed and authorised Taqi ul-Din to be in charge of the purification process. First, all Christian trappings which had been placed during the crusader occupation were removed from the buildings, and the mihrab (niche) of the mosque which had been concealed by the Knights Templar was uncovered. Then when all trapping were removed, rose-water was poured over the walls and the floors of the two buildings, which were then perfumed with incense. The floors were covered with precious carpets instead of woven and straw mats, and the minbar (pulpit), which had once been commissioned by Nur al-Din, was now installed. Even Ibn al-Athir, who throughout his writings had shown an implacable hostility towards Saladin for usurping the place of his Zengid masters, understood the symbolism of what had taken place: 'Saladin ordered the purification of the Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock of all the filths and impurities'. Ibn al-Athir's choice of the word anjas (plural of najas) to denote the impurities was deliberate, and reflected the

traditional Islamic view of the Franks, who had encroached on Islamic sacred space.

As to who would deliver the first khutba on the Friday after the entry into Jerusalem, one imagines there would have been fierce competition for, among the religious clerics, no greater honour could be imagined. Naturally the khatib would be a Shafii, to reflect the madhab of Saladin, and the choice finally fell on Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Zaki, the qadi of Aleppo. Imad al-Din captured the moment:

> *The sultan sat with his face gleaming with happiness. His seat looked as if it were surrounded by the halo of the moon. Around him readers of the Quran were reading the words of guidance and commenting; the poets were standing, reciting and seeking favours; while the flags were being unfolded in order to be raised and the pens were being sharpened in order to convey the good tidings. Eyes were filled with tears of joy while hearts were humbled in devotion to God and in joy for the victory.*

In the sermon Ibn al-Zaki stressed the theme of purification and spoke of the 'perfume of sanctification and glorification'. The sermon intransigently and deliberately emphasised God's oneness and was scathing on the subject of the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity. To all those listening, Ibn al-Zaki urged the continuation of the jihad: 'Maintain the holy war; it is the best means which you have of serving God, the most noble occupation of your lives'. And he had not forgotten Saladin and was fulsome in his praise: 'May God grant you His best reward', he intoned, 'for the service you have rendered to His blessed Prophet Muhammad'. When Ibn al-Zaki had spoken, Saladin then turned to Zein Ibn Naja, the man whom he had once labelled as his Amr Ibn al-As, and who had become one of his closest advisers in Egypt, and he asked him to preach to the congregation. Ibn Naja, who had been the disciple of al-Jilani, spoke so eloquently and powerfully that the congregation was reduced to tears.

Shortly afterwards some Muslims approached Saladin and demanded that he destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, arguing that its destruction would stop Christians coming to Jerusalem. 'The Franks will stop wanting to make pilgrimage there', they argued, 'and then we will be at peace.' Saladin listened to their words, but he turned down their request, for not only was it against Islamic law but he also understood that the destruction of the church would not prevent Christians from coming to

Jerusalem. Saladin would also have known – or if he did not then he would have been quickly informed by the scholars – that when the caliph Umar conquered Jerusalem in 637, he ordered that the church should not be demolished and that the Christians should have the right to worship. Nevertheless, in order to increase the Muslim presence in the city, Saladin installed a number of Arab tribes in and around Jerusalem.

Clearly Saladin's capture of Jerusalem had made a mark on many Muslims and it was during this period that Saladin was approached by Ibn Shaddad, who had composed a treatise that he called *The Virtues of Jihad*. The two men had met before; in 1184 Ibn Shaddad had visited Damascus and Saladin was so impressed by him that he offered him a teaching position in a madrasa in Egypt, but Ibn Shaddad did not accept.[5] The second time was in February 1186, when Ibn Shaddad accompanied another Mosuli delegation to conclude peace terms with Saladin, who was ill at Harran. It was Ibn Shaddad who administered the oath to Saladin. Saladin must have remembered him, for he did not give him permission to return to Mosul and dispatched Isa al-Hakkari to inform him that Saladin wished he should enter into his employment. Ibn Shaddad was appointed as judge of the army and for the rest of Saladin's life he remained the closest person to him. In fact, apart from a period between October 1189 and spring 1190, when he was sent to Baghdad on a diplomatic mission,[6] it can be claimed that Ibn Shaddad never left Saladin's side.

In Jerusalem Saladin and his family continued in the tradition of Ayyub and Shirkuh, and above all of Nur al-Din, in their adherence to the principles of the Sunni Revival. In the Church of St Anne, which was the traditional place for the birthplace of the Virgin, Saladin ordered the construction of a magnificent madrasa for the Shafiite madhab. He also commissioned al-Khanaqah al-Salihiyya, which was a hospice for sufis. In return for being lodged and fed, the sufis were expected to devote their time to dhikr, the invocation of God, and the recitation of the Quran. Saladin's son, al-Afdal, followed in his father's steps and constructed a Maliki madrasa, which lodged the pilgrims from North Africa, the majority of whom followed the Maliki madhab. As for Saladin's brother, al-Adil, he commissioned the building of ablution and washing fountains within the holy precinct, and his son and Saladin's nephew, al-Malik al-Muzzaffar, had two madrasas built in Jerusalem. Nearly 20 years earlier Saladin had restored the rule of Sunni orthodoxy to Egypt. Now he was the first to introduce the

spirit of the Sunni Revival – as manifested in the construction of madrasas – to Jerusalem. His achievements in Egypt, which had proven to be of immense strategic importance, became the economic and military backbone to his successes in Syria. His achievement in Jerusalem, on the other hand, proved to be of profound symbolic value, for the recapture of Islam's third holiest site secured Saladin's place in history.

Chapter 13

The Arrival of Richard

All our men were wounded if not in their bodies in their hearts.

Ibn Shaddad

Conrad fortifies Tyre

All eyes now turned to Tyre. It was, Saladin was told by al-Mashtub, 'the only arrow left in the quiver of the infidels'. Even as these words were spoken, the city was slipping out of Saladin's grasp, for in Tyre there had arrived Conrad of Montferrat. Conrad, the third son of the Marquess William of Montferrat, had arrived in the Holy Land almost by accident. His early career had been in the Byzantine court, but his independent spirit had found the court atmosphere in Constantinople too stifling and he decided to sail to Acre, unaware of the disaster that had taken place at Hattin. On approaching the city port, he was surprised to see a customs boat, which informed him that Acre was in Muslim hands. Sailing away quickly, he headed for Tyre, where he landed and where this Italian knight was welcomed by its people as if he brought salvation with him.[1] Unanimously, the barons and knights of the city chose Conrad as their leader until a new crusade could be dispatched from Europe. Of one thing all could be certain: had Conrad not arrived Tyre would have fallen. News of Conrad's defiance at Tyre reached Saladin, who hurried to the city walls accompanied by an old man – a prisoner – whom he believed was

the key with which to open the city. The man was William of Montferrat, Conrad's father, and he was now brought out in view of Conrad, who was watching from the battlements. Surrender the city now, he was warned, or William would be put to death. The ruse failed, as Conrad replied that his father had lived long enough, and Saladin, true to his nature, set the old man free.

The truth was that too much precious time had been wasted at Jerusalem. Saladin's caution, often a source of strength, was increasingly to prove to be his Achilles heel. In the meantime Conrad had taken advantage by working furiously to strengthen the fortifications of the city. A deep ditch was dug across the causeway from the shore, which effectively rendered Tyre an island and allowed it to withstand a prolonged siege while it waited for succour from Genoa and Pisa. By the time the Muslim armies reached Tyre, on 12 November 1187, the defiant city with its 6-metre (20-feet) walls and inspired by the feisty Italian knight was ready to withstand a prolonged siege and a bombardment of Saladin's mangonels. In fact Saladin's army was short of men; winter was approaching and Keukburi insisted that he wanted to go on the pilgrimage, while Taqi ul-Din wished to return home. There was initial optimism and Imad al-Din, who was accompanying Saladin, had written to al-Qadi al-Fadil that Tyre would fall, though he ominously added that the Muslims had been used to easy victories and at Tyre they had had to abandon their soft life.

At the same time Saladin was dismayed by the lukewarm reception from the Abbasid caliph, who feared the power that Saladin was able to harness. Imad al-Din had warned him to choose his envoy to Baghdad carefully but Saladin, in a hurry to send news of the fall of Jerusalem, had chosen a young Iraqi who, in a moment of drunkness, had boasted of Saladin's ambitions. Instead of praise, Saladin received a reprimand for adopting the caliph's name – al-Nasir – as his own. After all, Saladin was icily reminded, had he not conquered Jerusalem under the banner of the caliph? Baghdad's rebuke drove Saladin to a rare display of anger: 'As for the claim of the caliph that I conquered Jerusalem with his army and under his banners – where were they?' Saladin's anger was echoed by al-Adil and Taqi ul-Din, although al-Qadi al-Fadil urged restraint towards Baghdad. But it was abundantly clear that even the recapture of Jerusalem could not compensate in the caliph's view for the spread of Saladin's influence.[2] Indeed, when news reached Baghdad of the fall of Jerusalem, the reaction of one of the caliph's advisers

tells us all that we need to know: 'This man [Saladin] thinks he will overturn the Abbasid dynasty'.

Saladin was soothed by the arrival of his brother al-Adil and his son al-Afdal, but the weather was as grim as the mood, and snow was in the air. Saladin had ordered warships to sail from Beirut to drive the Frankish ships into harbour but on 30 December Conrad launched a daring assault which transformed the siege dramatically. Using the full force of the naval support that Tyre offered him, Conrad surprised the Muslim fleet and caused great destruction. Saladin had lost control of the sea. In the meantime his amirs were becoming increasingly restless; it was so late in the year, they needed to return to their lands. Seeing his army disintegrate before him, Saladin had no choice but to disband and retire for the winter. He himself was exhausted physically and mentally, and his ill health was plaguing him increasingly to the point where he was a shadow of the man that had been victorious at Hattin just a few months earlier. Taqi ul-Din left with the troops of Mosul and Sinjar;[3] al-Adil departed for Egypt; and Saladin's son al-Zahir left for Aleppo. The siege engines that could not be moved were destroyed and Saladin moved south of Acre, where he remained in camp until spring. The only amirs of note who remained with him during the winter were Izz al-Din Jurdik and Isa al-Hakkari, both of whom he knew from his days in Egypt. During the winter months, relations with the caliph further deteriorated, following a tragic incident during the pilgrimage. Ibn al-Muqaddam, who had been the first to invite Saladin to Damascus after Nur al-Din's death, had led the Syrian pilgrims to Mecca that year and it appears that he insisted on raising Saladin's standard at Mount Arafat, only to clash with Iraqi pilgrims who wished to tear it down. Ibn al-Muqaddam was wounded and died of his wounds shortly after. What should have been a peaceful religious ritual now further added to the tension between Damascus and Baghdad.

Tyre had not fallen – the only blemish in an otherwise remarkable year. But how serious this blemish would be was too early to tell. Saladin had achieved all that he had promised: the Frankish army had been destroyed, the Kingdom of Jerusalem wiped out and Jerusalem recaptured. Saladin hoped that Tyre would fall to him in the following spring, but deep down he feared it may not. And more alarming news reached him in the form of a letter from the German emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, who had taken the Cross as soon as he had heard of the calamity of Hattin and who promised

to unleash the full force of the German race to regain Jerusalem. Saladin could now no longer be in any doubt that a dark cloud was approaching, which threatened to destroy all that he had achieved. The arrival of Imad al-Din Zengi of Sinjar with troops in May 1188 gave him some hope. To some extent Saladin was wary of the Zengids, who had grudgingly sent forces but who remained bitter, and he certainly had not forgotten the trouble they had caused him. However, Saladin was careful to extend as much hospitality and grace as needed to soothe this raw nerve. He came out to greet Imad al-Din Zengi personally, and both men dismounted from their horses to emphasise equality of rank. Imad al-Din was presented with gifts and delicacies – delicious apricots had arrived from Damascus – and he was seated next to Saladin, who went as far as to spread a satin cloth for him to walk on. No expense was spared to keep the Muslim alliance together.

With Tyre holding out, Saladin turned his attention towards Antioch, the capture of which was of immense significance since it would block the land route for any crusader armies. With Imad al-Din Zengi commanding his right wing, Saladin swept towards the north. In July 1188 Tartus fell, to be followed by Latakia, but the attack on Antioch never came. Saladin himself wanted to attack and lay siege, but he could not convince the Zengid Imad al-Din, who saw no benefit in helping the Ayyubid Saladin. After all, the fall of Antioch would leave Saladin more powerful than before; its survival was no threat to his own lands and there was no reason for him to show an excess of zeal.[4] To the great frustration of al-Qadi al-Fadil Saladin turned back. As for the Zengid–Ayyubid rivalry, it seemed that victory in the holy war was not in itself enough to settle old scores.[5] The anti-climax of Antioch was partly relieved when news reached Saladin that Kerak, the bastion of Reynald of Chatillon, had fallen to al-Adil, and in January 1189 the castle of Kaukab also fell. But Tyre continued to resist and in addition there was an acute shortage of money and many of the amirs avoided Saladin lest he ask for money. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani wrote in April 1189 from Damascus to al-Qadi al-Fadil, who was in Egypt, complaining about the situation. Al-Qadi al-Fadi replied claiming that in comparison to Egypt, Damascus' problems were like a drop in the ocean. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani's financial situation itself was not in a healthy state and at one stage he contemplated leaving Saladin to seek his fortune elsewhere. The fact that Saladin's eulogist-in-chief could have thought, even if only half seriously, of abandoning him shows something of the extent of the problems that were to be faced.[6]

The siege of Acre

When Saladin had brought Guy to the walls of Ascalon to negotiate for the city's surrender, the king had been mocked and abused by the city's defenders. From the moment that he had appeared in Palestine and had managed to win the heart of Sybil and thereby inherit the Kingdom of Jerusalem, it seems that Guy was vilified by all. The native Franks of Outremer resented this newcomer and even Baldwin IV had vainly attempted to dissolve his sister's marriage to him. Guy's vacillation at Hattin had opened him to charges of cowardice and weakness, and with the collapse of the royal tent it seemed that he had made his final mediocre contribution to the unfolding drama. But there was more to Guy than it seems anyone expected, and he now emerged from the shadows of shame. Saladin had released him on the promise that he would not fight against him, but Guy had been quick to find a cleric who absolved him from his oath. He then marched to Tyre and demanded entry into his city, only to be rebuffed brusquely by Conrad, who had no intention of handing over his gain. Guy found the city gates as closed to him as they had been to Saladin. But Guy was, if nothing else, dogged, and when Christian reinforcements began arriving in the Holy Land he assembled a patchwork force and marched on Acre. It was a march of folly – one based on a kind of sublime ignorance which reckoned not the cost of an action, merely its appeal.[7] Clearly Guy remained as foolish as ever; this time, however, fortune quite remarkably would favour him. As Tyerman concludes, Guy's was a desperate adventure that avoided destruction only because of Saladin's caution.[8]

In fact Saladin had a very good reason to be cautious, for though he received news of Guy's march with incredulity, he was more concerned with the German storm that was gathering on the horizon. When the news of the disaster at Hattin reached Europe, the shock was profound. Pope Urban III had died of grief when he had heard about the calamity, while Henry II, who had promised on so many occasions to take up the Cross, was dumbstruck and did not speak a word for four days. It was the knights of Germany who were the first to respond. The first German pilgrims to take the Cross did so in December 1187 and they were followed three months later by the emperor, who had written defiantly to Saladin. So great was the response that no fleet could be found to carry the crusaders. It is estimated that by May 1189 more than 50,000 had set out from Germany. And

behind the Germans it was rumoured that the kings of France and England were meeting to put aside their differences and take up the Cross to avenge Jerusalem.

With the arrival of the spring of 1189 troops began to return to fortify Saladin, and among the first to arrive were Shirkuh's grandson and Ibn al-Muqaddam's son. In April Saladin secured a success when Beaufort fell. Beaufort had belonged to Reginald of Sidon and when, after Hattin, Saladin had besieged it, Reginald had pleaded for a three-month period of relief, following which he promised to hand over the castle. To the astonishment of his advisers, Saladin agreed to Reginald's request. But soon it became obvious that Reginald had tricked Saladin, so when he returned to ask for more respite he discovered that there was a limit to Saladin's generosity and he was imprisoned in Damascus. Now, when Beaufort finally fell, Reginald was released. Meanwhile the force that Guy led, which was besieging Acre, was being strengthened daily. Ludwig of Thuringia, who had landed in Tyre, succeeded in reconciling Guy with Conrad, who now marched with him to join the siege, though Conrad refused to acknowledge Guy as king. Daily, Christian forces added weight to the besiegers; thousands of French and Italian crusaders poured in and they were strengthened by a strong force of Templars under Gerard of Ridefort, who had been released by Saladin on the vow that he would not fight against him but who had subsequently taken the view that vows made to infidels were not valid. However, Gerard's vow was not forgotten by the Muslims, so when he was captured, following an attack on Acre, he was put to death. It was increasingly clear that Saladin should have attacked Guy before he reached Acre. Instead he was more concerned with the approaching German Crusade and did not wish to commit too many men to Acre, so it was not until the autumn that he was able to focus his full force on relieving Acre. In the meantime, in August 1189, Guy took advantage of Saladin's distraction to launch an assault on the city, which would have fallen to him but for the timely arrival of a Muslim relief force. This was followed by Saladin at the head of the army, and was strengthened with the arrival of Taqi ul-Din and Keukburi, as well as by troops from Mosul and Sinjar.

Finally, when the Muslim army had gathered, Saladin could act. He hoped that the Franks would come out and attack but they refused to and instead felt strong enough to tighten their blockade of Acre. For two days

the Muslim army attacked and the fighting was severe. This was the first field action since the battle of Hattin, but the Franks remained solid in the face of the assaults. Saladin anxiously monitored the attacks closely and Ibn Shaddad noted that for those two days he barely touched food. In the meantime the Frankish forces were increasing at an alarming rate and by October 1189 they numbered 100,000 as more and more crusaders poured in. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani noted that they were swarming like ants and had deepened their trenches so that it had become impossible to attack them. The fighting continued, though the morale of the Muslim army was increasingly low; they had been on horseback for 50 days and it was time to regroup. Despite the increased strain which affected his health, Saladin rode out daily, determined to fight. 'They will not do anything', he complained to Ibn Shaddad, 'unless I am riding with them and watching how they act.' He had personally suffered losses with the death of his nephew as well as his dear friend and fellow Kurd Isa al-Hakkari, who had been instrumental in his appointment as vizier in Egypt and who had led him and Shirkuh in prayer. Although Saladin was strengthened by the arrival of al-Adil from Egypt at the head of fresh troops, the winter weather closed in and any chance of serious fighting ended.

The sight of so many crusaders arriving added to Saladin's disillusionment. He knew if he did not act quickly it would be too late and so he dispatched Ibn Shaddad north with letters to Mosul, Sinjar and Irbil, as well as to the caliph in Baghdad, pointing out the difference between the zeal of the German crusaders and the lukewarm response of the Muslims. He also sent a message to his brother Tughtekin in Yemen, requesting men, and wrote to Qyzyl-Arslan, the Lord of Hamadan. Shortly after, the caliph's response came: instead of men Saladin simply received a note authorising him to borrow 20,000 dinars from merchants and charge the loan to Baghdad. It was a derisory amount and Saladin, who was spending up to 20,000 dinars a day, did not take the money. Perhaps his mind went back to the time when the Shiite Fatimid caliph al-Adid had given him one million dinars to defend Damietta. Ibn Shaddad, as was his wont, phrased the turning down of the money diplomatically: 'The sultan', he wrote, 'begged to decline the money order and the burden it imposed.' It is difficult, as Lyons and Jackson write, not to conclude that relations were so strained between Baghdad and Saladin that the caliph's gift was intended as a diplomatic insult.[9]

To tighten the siege of Acre, the Franks had constructed mobile siege engine towers, which loomed over the city. So alarmed was the garrison that they had begun to negotiate surrender terms, and in April 1190 swimmers brought Saladin the grave news that the city was in danger. Saladin tried to relieve the pressure on the garrison and sent out urgent calls for troops. Although the immediate danger to Acre passed, the news that the German crusade was marching through Asia Minor sent shock-waves across the Muslim world. In Homs and Hama orders were issued that grain should be stored, and even as far as Alexandria and Damietta fortifications were strengthened. Saladin, meanwhile, remained gloomy. He wrote that the Frankish command of the sea meant that when one Frank was killed at least a thousand came to replace him. When news arrived that the Germans had made peace with Kilij Arslan, which allowed them safe passage, the situation became critical, so Saladin dispatched forces northward, headed by Taqi ul-Din. 'Kilij Arslan was making a show of hostility to the emperor', wrote Ibn Shaddad, 'but the truth of the matter was that he had reached a secret understanding with him . . . He sent guides with him to show him the way.' Not surprisingly, Barbarossa's death came as a relief, and his younger son, the Duke of Swabia, now took over the command of the army, which rapidly disintegrated. Nevertheless the German approach had forced Saladin on the defensive, and it was not until November 1190, when the threat had passed, that he was joined by al-Zahir and Taqi ul-Din. Fierce fighting followed – the fiercest action since Hattin – but the Muslims were unable to dislodge the Franks or relieve the pressure on Acre. However, the fighting did offer glimpses of Saladin's character. On one occasion a number of Frankish prisoners were captured and Saladin's young sons asked to be allowed to kill them, but he refused, lest they should acquire a taste of blood. On another, a three-month-old baby was stolen from the Frankish camp and – such was Saladin's reputation – the Franks advised the mother to go and plead with Saladin, for they informed her he was a merciful man. She was bought to him by his guards and he quickly found out that the baby had been sold in the slave market. He then ordered that the baby should be bought back and he returned it to the mother. Then he ordered a horse to be brought to escort her back to the Frankish camp.

Throughout 1189 and 1190 Muslim anxiety of a Frankish counter-attack augmented, as the Christians were strengthened with the arrival of Frederick of Swabia and the remnants of the German crusade. Even more

ominous, however, was the arrival of Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was accompanied by the advance guard of the English crusaders, behind whom Richard I, king of England, was arriving. The influx of Christian troops brought with it succour to the Franks, but it was not without cost, for living conditions worsened and diseases broke out which carried away many. One of those who would now die of typhus was Queen Sibylla, through whom Guy had claimed the throne, and her death meant that he could be challenged. Conrad saw his opportunity and at once made a claim to the throne by marrying Isabella, Sibylla's sister. The problem with that was twofold – if not threefold: first, Isabella was married to Humphrey of Toron; second, Conrad was already married; and third, Conrad was married again, for he had not one but two wives, who were very much alive and undivorced. One imagines that these impediments would have been insurmountable, but for Conrad, who had already demonstrated an indefatigable energy to overcome obstacles, they were mere details. And so when the archbishop baulked at what Conrad proposed, he simply found a fellow Italian, the Archbishop of Pisa, who was willing (for an extension of his city's trading privileges in the kingdom) to annul just about anything.[10] Conrad then married Isabella, although there was one further complication – insignificant in comparison: she was already pregnant. As Imad al-Din al-Isfahani acidly puts it, it appeared that pregnancy was not a bar to marriage in the religion of the Franks. In the meantime the crusaders were being strengthened on a daily basis and their siege of Acre tightened. In 1190 Henry of Champagne arrived at the head of a sizeable French force and was later followed by the king of France himself, Philip Augustus.

The fragmentation of Saladin's army

As for Saladin, his greatest challenge was how to keep his army from disintegrating. While his army besieged the besiegers of Acre, his amirs fretted with impatience. They were beginning to tire of this holy war, which seemed never to bring any material benefits. One by one they now sought excuses to return to their lands: Sanjar Shah, the son of Saif al-Din of Mosul who had troubled Saladin so much, came to him and requested permission to depart, but was told that the time was not right. He then bent over and kissed Saladin's hand, but no sooner had he left the tent than he ordered his men to strike camp. When Saladin heard of this he dispatched a courier after

him with a letter: 'You became restless and have taken this step, leaving without goodwill and without a conclusion of matters with the enemy. Look to yourself, see to whom you may attach yourself other than me . . . I have no longer any concern for your welfare.' As it happened, Sanjar Shah ran into Taqi ul-Din, who was returning to camp, and Taqi ul-Din advised him to return to camp: 'The best course for you is to return to his service and to stay close until he gives you permission. You are a child and do not know the disaster that may come from this.' Sanjar Shah, however, was determined not to return and declared that it was impossible for him to turn back, at which point Taqi ul-Din, whom Ibn Shaddad noted was very bold and decisive and no respecter of persons, spoke harshly: 'You will return whether you want to or not'. Cowed by Taqi ul-Din, Sanjar Shah returned, though he feared Saladin's ire and he remained close to Taqi ul-Din for protection. Saladin chose to take no action over this desertion, but was later quoted as saying that he had never heard ill of anyone without finding it less than had been reported, except in the case of Sanjar Shah. Next to try to leave was Imad al-Din Zengi, who sent Saladin a note threatening to strike camp and head east. Saladin sent it back with a line of poetry: 'He who loses one like me, what I wonder can he gain?' Imad al-Din understood the implied threat and for the time being remained.

But though the fretting of the Zengids and their desire to return home could not have surprised Saladin, even those closest to him now began to look elsewhere. Nothing symbolises the fragmentation of the Muslim army more than the fact that both Taqi ul-Din and Keukburi now left Saladin's service. As Saladin's nephew, Taqi ul-Din had served him with tremendous courage throughout the years, and had commanded the wing of Saladin's army with fortitude and brilliance. Now, even he was tiring. Once, many years earlier, the satirist al-Wahrani had advised Taqi ul-Din to cease the holy war and to settle in Damascus and to enjoy the delights of life, and now he began to think about carving an empire for himself and establishing a dynasty of his own. To understand and appreciate Saladin's achievement in keeping together his army in the field for three years it is necessary to understand the independent nature of the amirs. Yes, Taqi ul-Din had served his uncle loyally, but if Saladin died – and had he not been at death's door at Harran? – would his sons be as generous towards Taqi ul-Din as Saladin had been? In 1186 Taqi ul-Din had sought to establish himself independently in the Maghreb and to launch a campaign against the Almohades, but

Saladin had talked him out of it. But Taqi ul-Din's patience was limited; he had done his bit for the holy war – after all, had he not himself seized the True Cross? Now there was land to conquer and a dynasty to establish. He left the camp at Acre and swept through the lands of Upper Mesopotamia and even invaded Armenia. Saladin had warned him not to endanger any treaties that had been signed, but Taqi ul-Din had paid little heed. So widespread was his destruction as he captured town after town – sometimes in Saladin's name, sometimes in his own – that local rulers refused to send any more troops for the holy war. Even the caliph, alarmed and suspicious of Taqi ul-Din's motives, wrote urgently to Saladin demanding that he be reined in. Saladin, of course, was incapable of doing so, and the only option that he had – one that was advocated by al-Qadi al-Fadil, who could see the damage that Taqi ul-Din was causing – was to disavow him publicly. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the age in which Saladin lived than this episode with his nephew. For Taqi ul-Din's actions were the norm and not the exception; it was the holy war which was the mirage. Saladin, of course, understood this as well as anyone – after all, he had himself carved an empire for himself in Egypt, and it was only Nur al-Din's death that had prevented an inevitable confrontation.

As for Keukburi, the reasons for his departure were different. The death of his brother had effectively handed him control over Irbil, and he departed with Saladin's blessing. Nevertheless, the loss of a man who had excelled in battle and who was a patron of many madrasas – and who, in addition, was through family ties intimate with Saladin – could not but be greatly felt. The two men remained in touch by letter, but interestingly when Saladin asked Keukburi to return to take avenge over the massacre of Muslims in Acre, he chose not to.

The fall of Acre and the massacre of the 3,000

Then, on 8 June 1191, the trumpets blared out throughout the crusader camp besieging Acre, signalling that a great event had occurred: the king of England Richard I had reached Acre. As Ibn Shaddad noted, 'their princes had been threatening us with his arrival'. With the arrival of Richard we begin the final and most dramatic chapter of Saladin's life. To date, those crusaders who had opposed Saladin could not possibly measure up to him; neither Guy nor Reynald should be seen as anything more than

part actors in the drama. Admittedly Baldwin IV had fought with great stoic heroism to hold the kingdom together, but his short tragic life was a cruel interlude. Richard's reputation for fighting, on the other hand, was formidable and had preceded him, for the news of his sacking of Cyprus had reached Saladin. Ibn Shaddad certainly did not underestimate him: 'He was wise and experienced in warfare and his coming had a dread and frightening effect on the hearts of Muslims'. Yes, the king of France was equally in the Holy Land, but he was no match for the Lionheart. In any case, there was little love lost between the two men. In public Richard would boast of descent from the devil himself, and with his arrival Saladin would finally be tested by a real king – fierce, determined, proud and capable. And during that ordeal, Saladin would endure great hardships.

Fierce fighting followed Richard's arrival. On 11 June he secured an early triumph when a Muslim ship with 700 fighting men was sunk. At the same time Acre was subjected to furious assaults and almost daily there were attacks on the city. Richard had no intention of making a meek arrival – that was not the nature of kings – and he tried to arrange a meeting with Saladin. In typical fashion, Saladin responded by sending gifts to the king of England but turned down the possibility of any meeting, claiming that it would be unbecoming for kings to meet and then fight afterwards. In any case there was no point: 'He does not understand my language and I do not understand his'. Saladin then offered to send his brother al-Adil, but an illness – most probably camp fever – had struck Richard and the meeting did not take place. Within days Richard had recovered enough to supervise siege operations, propped up in his bed with a crossbow. While the Muslim garrison could no longer be reinforced, the constant arrival of Christian troops meant that the assault on Acre remained relentless. Infantry assaults were combined with close investments by Richard's engineers, who battered and undermined the city walls. Deep ditches were filled and siege towers were wheeled so close to Acre's walls that they overlooked the city. Slowly and inexorably Richard's grip on Acre tightened.

In the meantime Saladin was like a man possessed, daily launching furious attacks on the Christian camp in a desperate attempt to relieve the siege. At the end of June he was reinforced by the arrival of troops, though Taqi ul-Din's adventures and rampages deprived him of any troops from Diyar Bakr. On 2 July Saladin once again tried desperately to relieve the pressure by attacking the Christian camp. According to Ibn Shaddad, he took no

food that day and urged his men on with tears in his eyes, while al-Adil joined the fight himself. Under the enormous strain, his health suffered dramatically and 'numerous boils appeared on his body from his waist to his knees'. His doctors became alarmed as he refused to eat and insisted on riding among his troops, urging, pleading, cajoling and shaming his men forward. Tear-stained and almost demented with a passion to relieve Acre, Saladin refused to accept that the besieged city's days were numbered. But he was deceiving himself, for though this was not the time for cool retrospection, the fact was that Acre was almost certainly lost from the moment that Saladin had allowed Guy of Lusignan to set up his camp to besiege the city.

Envoys from Richard travelled back and forth to Saladin's camp. On one occasion Richard informed Saladin that he wished to send him a gift of falcons and hunting dogs and asked for chickens to feed them in order to fatten them up first. The request brought a smile to al-Adil's face, accompanied by a pithy reply as to whether the chickens were intended for the dogs' or the king's stomach. The constant embassies between the two camps of course served another purpose; it allowed both sides to test the morale of the other. And so whenever the Franks came to Saladin, he was always happy to allow them to wander in the army market, where they could marvel at the plentitude of the 7,000 shops and the 1,000 baths.

Inside the city, the Muslim commanders realised the futility of their situation. On 12 July 1191 a messenger, who had swum out from the doomed city, reached Saladin's camp. The message was clear: unless Saladin could drive the crusaders away then in a matter of hours Acre would surrender. Saladin could be under no illusion about how serious the message was, for the commanders of Acre were none other than al-Mashtub and Qaraqush, two men whom he knew and trusted from his early days in Egypt. Nevertheless, even in this late hopeless stage Saladin refused to accept that the city was lost and sent a swimmer back into Acre with an urgent message: do not surrender. But it was a futile appeal, for even if Saladin refused to accept the inevitable, his army had, and when he ordered them to launch another attack on the Christian camp, they refused to obey his orders. Only a group of Kurdish horsemen, kin of al-Mashtub, kept up the fight, as did Izz al-Din Jurdik, who once, many years ago, had aided Saladin in capturing and slaying Shawar. On 12 July 1191 the Muslim commanders in Acre accepted Christian terms for the surrender of the city. Under the terms, the

True Cross lost at Hattin was restored, 1,600 Christian prisoners held in Damascus were to be released and the Muslims were to pay 200,000 dinars to the Franks (they were also to pay 10,000 dinars to Conrad). Until the terms were met, the garrison was to be imprisoned by the Franks. When news of the terms reached Saladin he refused to accept them and called a war council, during which Ibn Shaddad noted that his ideas were disturbed and he appeared confused and distracted. But as Saladin urged his commanders on to battle, events overtook him and Christian banners were seen on the city walls of Acre.

The loss of Acre drained Saladin – Ibn Shaddad wrote that the sultan was more affected than a bereft mother or a distracted love-sick girl – but it was not an insurmountable setback. Saladin knew that his best chance at defeating the Franks was when they were on the move, and so the end of the siege, tragic and debilitating though it was, at least broke the stalemate. But what was beyond dispute was that the fall of Acre was a blow to Saladin's prestige. Like a man possessed, he had raged against its fall and had thrown all his forces to save it. But it had nevertheless fallen and with it the fissures and recriminations in his army – between the Kurds and the Turks and between the Zengids and the Ayyubids – began to surface. Meanwhile he faced an urgent problem of having only 30 days to meet the conditions of the treaty. He devoted his time collecting the prisoners and the money, but he clearly did not trust the Franks to keep their word of releasing the men in the garrison. So after the payment of the first instalment he asked for the garrison to be released, and he offered to release more hostages for the remaining 100,000 dinars which had to be paid. In the meantime Richard had time to assess the military situation and act accordingly. He had been relieved that the French king Philip had departed, for now there could be no dispute over who was the sole commander. Saladin was delaying the settlement of the Acre agreement and Richard suspected there were military reasons behind this delay, for there were rumours of an Egyptian army coming to reinforce his troops. Richard knew that his army could not remain in Acre and had to march south, but the reality that dawned on him was that it was not he who was keeping the garrison as prisoners, but the garrison that was keeping him a prisoner at Acre.

On 20 August, the day Richard believed he had agreed with Saladin for the payment of the first instalment, he ordered his army out of Acre. Muslim spies reported that the king of England's army was occupying the whole

plain outside Acre. Richard spent the morning waiting to hear any news from the Muslim camp about the fulfilment of the terms of the agreement, but when none was forthcoming he acted in a way which horrified the watching spies. Numbering around 3,000, the garrison of Acre was marched out on to the plain, roped together, men leading men, their hands bound. Then the massacre commenced. By the time night fell, so had the 3,000. Ibn Shaddad wrote that:

> *Our spies had informed Saladin of the enemy's manoeuvres, and he sent some reinforcements; but by then the slaughter had already taken place . . . The next morning the Muslims wanted to see who had fallen, and found their martyred companions lying where they fell; and some they recognised.*

It is impossible to determine who was to blame for the massacre. Richard may genuinely have believed that Saladin had broken the terms of the agreement. In any case Richard was determined to march south from Acre and the delays were both frustrating and dangerous, for it was clear that Saladin was rapidly calling up reinforcements. At the same time the massacre – chilling in its severity – would have had a salutary effect on the Muslim populace, for no garrison would now resist Richard's advance. As for Saladin, his natural prevarications may have contributed to the massacre, but the truth was that neither side trusted the other. Ibn Shaddad's commentary is probably the fairest analysis of Richard's actions. He believed that only two possibilities could explain the massacre: 'One was that they had killed them as a reprisal for their own prisoners killed before then. Another was that the king of England had decided to march on Ascalon and did not want to leave behind a large number of enemy soldiers.' What was certain was that with the arrival of Richard, Saladin was faced with a foe the calibre of which he had previously not encountered. He had suspected that the capture of Jerusalem would unleash a terrible storm from Europe and now, on the plains of Acre, the corpses of the 3,000 Muslims was a bloody proof of how severe this storm would be.

On hearing of the massacre Saladin was moved to fury, which was unlike him. For the next few days – and until his natural benevolence was restored – few Christians who crossed his path were spared. In this manner, a day after the massacre a knight – 'his appearance announced that he was a leading man among them' – was captured and brought to Saladin. Through an interpreter, he was asked about the state of Richard's army and then as to

why the massacre of the Muslims had taken place. The knight replied that it had been the will of the king of England. Saladin then ordered that the knight be put to death, and when this was translated to him, he visibly blanched and requested that he would free a Muslim prisoner in his place instead. Normally this was standard practice, for the release of a high-ranking Muslim was invaluable for Saladin. The knight was fettered and judgement on his fate deferred as Saladin rode out to look over his army. On his return, however, he ordered that the knight be put to death. Later that afternoon two Franks were brought in as prisoners and were executed on Saladin's orders. The following day two further prisoners were captured and were executed, and that night 14 Franks and a Frankish women were brought in. With them was a Muslim captive, a woman who clearly served the Frankish woman. Saladin ordered the release of the Muslim woman and the execution of the Franks.

The march towards Jaffa

A few days after the massacre Richard's army was ready to move, though we read that he had great difficulty clearing the inns and brothels in order to get his men on the road. But by 25 August 1191 the Muslims witnessed the Franks lighting fires and the army began its move. Richard's strategy was to take control of the entire coastline, thereby ensuring supremacy at sea. By sticking to the coast his army would also gain constant replenishment from the fleet. Then when Jaffa had fallen, he aimed to march inland to capture Jerusalem. The journey from Acre to Jaffa is around 130 kilometres (80 miles). August was of course the height of summer and the heat would have been intolerable. In addition, Richard knew that the Muslims would harass his men at every stage. Above all an iron discipline was required; the army could not allow itself to be dragged away from the coastline, nor could the knights be tempted to break away and charge the Muslim raiding parties. The marching army clung to the coastline, but the reality was that the Franks were an invading army with barely a toehold on the coast, while the hinterland was overwhelmingly Muslim. There was little sense of hurry as the army set off in three divisions, while the fleet sailed alongside. In each division the cavalry was flanked by two columns of infantry, one between it and the Muslim forces and the other marching along the shore. In that way Richard alternated his infantry; those on the march faced the enemy raids

and those on the shore carried the baggage and tents due to the lack of transport animals. The discipline of the army greatly impressed the watching Muslims. Ibn Shaddad noted that the infantry surrounded the cavalry like a wall. Wearing solid iron corslets and full-length chain mail, they appeared impervious to the Muslim arrows. 'I saw', wrote Ibn Shaddad, 'Franks with ten arrows fixed in their backs, pressing on in this fashion quite unconcerned.' Meanwhile the cavalry waited for opportunities to charge and then retreat behind the infantry. So disciplined was the Christian army under such severe conditions that Ibn Shaddad could not but be impressed and wrote of the 'endurance of these people, bearing exhausting tasks without any pay or material gain'. As for Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, he wrote that the marching infantry resembled hedgehogs bristling with arrows.

The heat was intense and the pace was accordingly slow. Marching was only in the mornings and rest was on alternate days. Countless men fainted and many dropped dead. Richard ordered the dead to be buried where they fell and the sick to be transported on to the ships. And from the high ground Saladin watched the slow inexorable march. He knew that as long as the Christian army maintained its discipline and ignored the skirmishes and harassment, he could do little. But he could bide his time and wait for the moment when the Crusaders would surely tire and lose their discipline. Then he would strike, and a second Hattin would be his. In the meantime he even enrolled 300 robbers from among the Bedouin to infiltrate the enemy and steal their property and horses. But Saladin had not reckoned with Richard. To march an army in the height of summer and to maintain such an iron discipline elevated him to the ranks of the great military commanders. And on the march he seemed to be everywhere. Furious assaults were launched against the marching army with Saladin at the heart. 'I saw him [Saladin] actually riding among the skirmishers as the enemy's arrows flew past him', wrote Ibn Shaddad. 'He was attended by two pages with two spare mounts and that was all, riding from division to division and urging them forward.' But when the Muslim raids attacked the rearguard trying to separate it from the rest of the army, Richard himself rushed to its defence, and in the words of a chronicler landed on the Muslims 'like a thunderbolt'. To the watching Saladin this was evidence of a great warrior and a formidable presence, but he was also shrewd enough to know that it was foolhardy for kings to take such risks, for surely an army that relied on its king to intervene personally would be lost without him. Nevertheless

Saladin was impressed. This was an army that maintained a discipline the like of which he had not seen previously. Yes, the Turkish cavalry could continue to harass the crusaders, but as long as they stayed out of reach of the Christian crossbowmen they were unable to inflict casualties and if they came too close they were picked off by the crossbowmen.

The two armies now marched down the coast in parallel, sometimes only 3 kilometres (2 miles) apart. Daily Saladin kept up the raids, and the crusaders, too, must have wondered at this enemy that never seemed to flag. To slow them down the Muslims targeted the horses which the knights depended on, and it was not long before many knights were marching shoulder to shoulder with the infantry, their lances carried on their backs. As for the numbers on the march, it is hard to estimate with great accuracy but a combination of the English and French crusaders of Richard, the remaining crusaders of Phillip, the German remnants of the Barbarossa crusade, and the forces of Guy, along with the Templars and Hospitallers would probably have numbered in the region of 20,000–30,000 infantry, with a cavalry force not likely to exceed 4,000–5,000 men. Saladin would have fielded an army roughly the same size as Richard's, 20,000–30,000 men, though with considerably more cavalry. As the armies moved south, more prisoners were captured and some revealed useful information. On one occasion Saladin was told that the Bedouin had approached Richard and had informed him that the Muslim army was not as numerous as he feared. The following day, however, a Muslim assault, which was so severe that it left hundreds of Christian soldiers wounded, convinced Richard otherwise and he had two of the Bedouin killed as a consequence. There was no doubt that the Christian army was suffering heavy casualties and around 5 September contact was made which requested that talks between the two camps be held. Saladin immediately welcomed this proposal and delegated al-Adil to be in charge, but he was motivated by factors other than peace talks: 'If you are able to spin out the talks with the Franks', he wrote to his brother, 'then perhaps they will remain where they are today' – for Saladin knew that reinforcements were arriving daily to strengthen his army. Al-Adil then met with Richard, but neither side truly wanted peace for there was still much fighting to be done. When al-Adil told Richard to elaborate on his offer, the king replied that the basic condition was that Saladin restored all the lands to him. Ibn Shaddad diplomatically wrote that al-Adil gave a harsh answer to that demand and the meeting broke up.

Saladin's defeat at Arsuf

On 3 September 1191 Saladin moved to the forest of Arsuf, for he decided that if he were to prevent Richard reaching Jaffa, then it was here – where the wooded terrain helped conceal his movements – that the battle had to take place. A few days later news reached him that the Franks were making for Arsuf; he now drew his army in parallel to the Frankish columns and, when the Christian vanguard reached the orchards, he committed his army to attack. His plan was to cut off the rearguard commanded by the Hospitallers from the rest of the army, and to destroy it before Richard rushed to its aid. On the morning of 7 September 1191 the Muslims began their attack. The Bedouins and Nubians launched arrows and javelins into the enemy lines, before parting to allow the mounted archers to advance, attack and wheel off – a well-practised technique to tempt the crusaders to charge them. At several points along the line the two armies were engaged in close hand-to-hand combat. As the fighting became more and more ferocious, there were times when the Christian forces were forced to fight while marching backwards through the thickets, and throughout the day the Muslim cries of 'Allahu Akbar' clashed with the Christian army's cries of 'Sanctum Sepulchrum adjuva'. No matter how ferocious the attacks were, the Hospitallers maintained their discipline and refused to take the Muslim bait and charge from the centre of the column. Several times messages were sent to Richard, but each time the reply was the same: they must resist the urge to charge the enemy. The furious nature of the Muslim assault and the tactics adopted were striking, for they were completely out of character for Saladin. This was not the cautious Saladin who carefully planned his actions and the consequences of those actions. In contrast to Hattin, where he had meticulously planned his victory, at Arsuf Saladin knew that the sea prevented him from surrounding his enemy, and by pressing them so closely while they were still unbroken he was exposing himself to a counter-attack.[11]

Although the Hospitallers suffered few losses, they were losing horses at an alarming rate. Several times they begged Richard to launch a full charge but Richard refused each request, waiting for Saladin to overreach himself and thereby be vulnerable to a counter-charge. Increasingly, however, as the day of 7 September wore on, and as the Muslim attacks intensified, the cohesion of the Hospitallers began to erode and gaps in the Christian

army appeared. Ibn Shaddad, who was an eyewitness, noted how intensely Saladin was participating in the battle itself: 'I met his brother in a similar state, while the arrows were flying past them both.' The battle of Arsuf had entered a critical stage. When a request by Garnier of Nablus (master of the Hospitallers) to Richard to attack had been turned down, the Hospitaller patience snapped, and with a cry of 'St George' the Hospitallers, followed by the French, charged the Muslim ranks. It was precisely what Saladin had hoped for: finally a break in the disciplined Christian army. But that day fortune favoured Richard, since at the same time the Hospitallers charged, Saladin's archers had dismounted to direct their arrows more accurately, and were overwhelmed by the unexpected onslaught. Quickly aware of events, Richard ordered a general attack all along the line, so breaking Saladin's army, which was pursued across the hills of Arsuf. Ibn Shaddad writes that he fled in confusion to the left wing but found that it, too, had broken and was in retreat. He then fled to the right wing, to discover that it also had been routed. Frantically he searched for Saladin, and made his way to the banners which were still upright and the drums which were beating, to find him surrounded by only 17 horsemen – the rest had fled – desperately trying to rally his troops. 'I was in attendance on him', wrote Ibn Shaddad, 'offering consolation, which, however, he was unable to accept. He was protected from the sun by a kerchief and we asked him to take some food. Something light was brought to him, from which he took only a little.'

It was a victory for Richard, but not as conclusive as at first thought. He was wary of the Muslims rallying and the Christian army overextending itself, and with the forest ahead the risk of ambush was high. Consequently the order was made to call the pursuit off. Nevertheless, although the defeat could have been more severe, Arsuf was a bitter blow for Saladin. At Acre Saladin had come to realise that he could not fight an entrenched Christian army; now at Arsuf he learned how dangerous it was to attack one that was on the move, especially one commanded by as formidable a leader as Richard. 'Never have we seen the like of him', an admiring Aleppan amir told Saladin. As far as casualties were concerned, the defeat could have been worse, but psychologically Richard's victory was almost total. As Ibn Shaddad ruefully wrote: 'All our men were wounded, if not in their bodies in their hearts'. And yet, though after Arsuf it became clear that the Muslim army could not win, the Franks could still lose.[12] Admittedly the morale was low, but Saladin could call up reinforcements, and if Richard could

be tempted to turn inland and make a dash for Jerusalem, then the tables would turn once again. But Richard was not prepared to risk heading inland just yet, for he needed Jaffa as his base for the conquest of Jerusalem. And so the Christian army resumed its march down the coast, and Saladin – taking care not to show any signs of weakness – continued his tactics of harassment and skirmishes.

As Richard made his way to Jaffa – it took just under 20 days to march the 130 kilometres (80 miles) from Acre – Saladin was deep in thought as to what the king of England's intentions were. From Jaffa, which would surrender to him without a serious fight, Richard could strike towards Jerusalem, but what if Jerusalem was not his target? Equidistant to Jerusalem from Jaffa lay the city of Ascalon, and if Jaffa was the key to Jerusalem, then Ascalon was the key to Egypt – and no one understood the importance of Egypt to the whole struggle more than Saladin. The dilemma which Saladin now faced went to the core of the holy war which he had over the years so assiduously claimed to fight. Jerusalem had been the centre of his propaganda campaign and the ultimate prize that the Sunni Revival demanded. And he had delivered Jerusalem as he promised he would. But at the heart of the matter was the realisation that though Jerusalem was symbolically important, strategically it was marginal. The intractable message proclaimed in the mosques and the madrasas across the Muslim world was 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem'; yet in the war councils it was whispered that while to lose Jerusalem was indeed a misfortune, to lose Egypt would be a catastrophe. In Richard's camp the same debate was raging. For him the prize of Egypt was tantalisingly close, but the shortage of manpower did not make it a realistic goal. Richard knew that Egypt had catapulted Saladin to power and he calculated that its downfall would signal his end. On the other hand, Richard was in the Holy Land because he had vowed to recapture Jerusalem and not in order to carve out an empire.

While Richard pondered Saladin acted. He knew he could not defend both cities but he anguished over his next step. He was certain that Richard would move against Jerusalem, but should he abandon the city and defend Ascalon, and if that city fell like Acre had done, should he retreat to Egypt where surely Richard would not pursue? Egypt was his powerbase and his treasury, and from Egypt he could ponder his next move. But to abandon Jerusalem would destroy his legitimacy and forever tarnish his reputation. It would be a betrayal of the principles of the holy war which he had so long

advocated. Jerusalem, Saladin decided, could not be abandoned. Once that decision had been taken then the next one followed immediately; if Jerusalem was to be defended then Ascalon had to be destroyed, since it could not be left fortified for Richard. 'I would rather lose all my children than cast a stone from the walls', Saladin told Ibn Shaddad. 'Yet, if God decrees it and prescribes it as a way of preserving the best interests of the Muslims, what else can I do?' Having made the decision there was no time to lose. Saladin himself travelled to Ascalon, reaching it on 11 September, leaving al-Adil to keep an eye on Richard in Jaffa. Within two weeks the city walls had been torn down. The distress of the inhabitants was obvious to all; people started to sell what they were unable to transport, and things that were worth 10 dirhams were sold for 1 dirham. But what mattered now was speed, and when the towers of the city walls were filled with wood and set on fire, Saladin became anxious that the smoke would be spotted by Richard, whose camp was less than 80 kilometres (50 miles) away. While Ascalon was being torn down, news reached Saladin that al-Adil had been approached by the Franks to parley. 'String them along and spin out your talks with them', he advised his brother, 'so that we can perhaps manage to destroy the town.' In fact Richard had been caught by surprise. News of the dismantling of Ascalon reached him while he was in Jaffa, and though he immediately tried to move south to prevent the total destruction of the city, he was too late: Ascalon, known as the 'bride of Syria', had been razed to the ground by the Muslims to prevent it falling fortified to the crusaders. One wonders how al-Qadi al-Fadil felt watching his city of birth being razed by his own Muslim soldiers. No matter, by the end of September Saladin had left Ascalon and made his way to Ramla: since the route from Jaffa to Jerusalem ran across the plain by Ramla, the city walls there were similarly torn down. Saladin had made his choice – Jerusalem would be defended at all cost, and he now dug in for a savage war of attrition.

Chapter 14

A Bitter Siege of Attrition: Saladin, Richard and Jerusalem

I saw him prostrating himself and repeating words with tears pouring down on to his prayer mat.

Ibn Shaddad

The death of Taqi ul-Din

On 1 November 1191 Ibn Shaddad received an urgent message from Saladin: 'Come now and come quickly'. The message asked him to bring with him al-Adil and another two close relatives, and by the tone of the message Ibn Shaddad knew he had no time to waste. When the men arrived, Saladin ordered that the tent be cleared and then took out a letter. As he read it aloud he began to weep, and so deep was his sorrow that those around him wept too, though they did not know the content of the letter. Quickly, however, it transpired that Taqi ul-Din had fallen ill and died. His death affected Saladin greatly and such was his sorrow that Ibn Shaddad had to admonish him, gently reminding him that too much grief was a challenge to God's will. Saladin replied simply, 'I ask pardon of God'. He then washed his eyes with rose-water and asked for a meal to be served. He ordered those present that Taqi ul-Din's death needed to be kept secret in order to maintain the morale of the army. The reason for Saladin's sorrow is not hard to explain for, of all his family, Taqi ul-Din was the one in whom he had most faith.

His bravery was renowned and he had commanded and fought in Saladin's army with tremendous valour and courage, never more so than at Hattin. Of course, Taqi ul-Din had also deserted and defied his uncle and had left Acre at a time which was critical, but in doing so he was simply conforming to the spirit of the age. Saladin had blamed his nephew for the loss of Acre, but now that he was dead he mourned him deeply. Humphrey's assessment of Saladin's reaction to Taqi ul-Din's death may appear severe, but it certainly is not without justification: 'Saladin was heartbroken to hear about his nephew's death', Humphreys wrote, 'but he was fortunate that it happened. By his selfish recklessness Taqi ul-Din had contributed to the disaster of Acre and had almost wrecked Saladin's painfully assembled coalition.'[1]

Ironically, the day after news of Taqi ul-Din's death reached Salaldin, he received a letter from Baghdad in which the caliph complained bitterly about Saladin's nephew's actions across the Euphrates. Saladin replied diplomatically, even though he obviously knew that ambition played a large part in his nephew's actions: 'We did not give orders for any of this. Al-Muzaffar [Taqi ul-Din] crossed the Euphrates only in order to gather troops and to return to Jihad'. However when the caliph then insisted in the letter that al-Qadi al-Fadil travel to Baghdad to explain Taqi ul-Din's actions, Saladin refused to budge and simply wrote back that he was too ill to undertake such a journey. As Saladin grieved, he also worried and calculated, for he understood that the consequences of Taqi ul-Din's death would require careful handling. The situation could not be more critical: Richard was only a few miles away from Jerusalem; Ascalon, one of the most important cities, had been razed to the ground to render it useless to the enemy; and Saladin was committed to fighting to the end. But, in the wake of his nephew's death, that is not what was uppermost on his mind. To understand why, it is necessary to appreciate that the rest of the Muslim world showed an obliviousness to what was happening that would have been comical if, from Saladin's point of view, it had not been so dispiriting.[2] First, at the height of the crisis, a minor ruler from Anatolia arrived in Saladin's camp demanding his support against his father, Kilij Arslan. Saladin patiently welcomed him and sent al-Adil to resolve his dispute. This reminds us of Saladin's claim that people were too terrified to speak when they used to approached Zengi, but that they constantly tired him with their pleadings. Then, when that matter had been resolved, the consequences of Taqi ul-Din's death arose as Saladin must have feared they would. Taqi ul-Din's young son, al-

Mansur, now demanded that he should be given his father's fiefs. Saladin hesitated, for he feared that he was too young to control them, for it should be recalled that Taqi ul-Din's lands were east of the Euphrates and it required a strong man to keep the Zengids in their place. Reluctantly, however, he agreed, though not without placing strict conditions.

What followed next shocked Saladin, for news reached him that the 20-year-old had allied himself with Bektimur of Khilat and had gone into open rebellion. The situation was critical, since it could signal the loss of Saladin's position east of the Euphrates and with it control over Sinjar and Edessa and maybe even Mosul. In addition Saladin desperately needed men to fight Richard and many now, including Bektimur, who was on the verge of sending forces, were holding back to see how the rebellion would resolve itself. At this most critical of junctures, when Richard was a few miles from Jerusalem, Saladin found himself submerged in a family quarrel. At first he ordered his son al-Afdal to cross the Euphrates to relieve Taqi ul-Din's son, but when the latter asked for al-Adil to intercede on his behalf, Saladin appeared to change his mind, only for his anger at his nephew's son to resurface, as he tore up the agreement that al-Adil had drawn as a compromise. 'Saladin', noted Ibn Shaddad, 'was overcome with rage that he could be addressed in such a way on the part of one of his grandchildren.' Obviously, this was not typical Saladin behaviour; clearly the loss of Acre, the destruction of Ascalon and the bitter war of attrition he was fighting were taking a heavy toll on his health. Fortunately he was surrounded by cool heads who urged caution. Abul Huija the Gross, one of his most loyal men, was accustomed to keeping his nerve in tense moments for he had once helped crush the Fatimid Sudanese rebellion in Cairo. Now he summed up the situation succinctly:

> *We cannot carry on two wars at the same time. If the sultan wishes us to fight the Muslims he must make peace with the infidels; then we will cross the Euphrates and fight but it must be under his leadership. If he wishes to keep on the holy war, let him pardon the Muslims and grant them peace.*

The choice could not be starker.

Other than Abul Huija the Gross there was al-Adil himself, on whom Saladin relied increasingly. When he had heard that his brother had ordered his son al-Afdal to cross the Euphrates to relieve al-Mansur, he was anxious, for he knew that al-Afdal himself had ambitions. There was no doubt that

Saladin's son was brave: at Arsuf he had charged the enemy so ferociously that a blood vessel in his face had burst. But his bravery could not conceal a certain self-indulgence in his character which, accompanied by a fondness for wine, raised suspicions of whether he would be fit to govern such a delicate area. In many ways he was like his other uncle Turan Shah – exemplary bravery in the heat of battle and insolent indolence in matters of governance.

What followed next tells us a great deal about Saladin's character. When al-Adil approached him with his doubts about al-Afdal, Saladin did not allow his anger to obscure his judgement and he listened and accepted his brother's words. He then sent orders to al-Afdal to return at once, and when this order provoked his son to anger, he defused it by waiting for a while then riding out to meet him and showing him great honour by dismounting from his horse to greet him, which normally a son would do for his father. Ultimately Saladin had to send al-Adil across the Euphrates to settle matters, and this deprived him of his brother at a critical time. Of those who troubled Saladin throughout his life, none troubled him more than his family.

Fortunately for Saladin Richard was equally preoccupied with internal matters. The question which dominated was who was to be appointed as king of Jerusalem. There were two contenders. Guy was the appointed king but although as Richard's vassal he was his chosen candidate, he lacked any popular support. His vacillation at Hattin remained a powerful obstacle to his credentials. The other candidate was Conrad, who lobbied for recognition and who increasingly feared Richard. In fact Saladin was remarkably well-informed about the disputes in the Christian camp – to such an extent that Richard once exclaimed in frustration 'Does Saladin know everything that happens?' – and he was eager to play the diplomatic game to gain any advantage. So when Conrad approached him with an offer to take his side against Richard in return for certain concessions, Saladin eagerly welcomed his rapprochement. Similarly Saladin encouraged al-Adil to enter into discussions with Richard, and the two men developed a respect – friendship is probably too strong a word – which involved hunting and feasting over French delicacies together. How seriously Saladin took these negotiations is hard to tell, but he was happy to prolong the talks, for he knew that Richard was eager to return to Europe. Militarily he had changed his tactics and now no longer intended to take the offensive; having dug in, it was up to Richard to fight, and Saladin could afford to wait indefinitely. As he pointed out to Richard in a letter, he was on his own land, surrounded by his own family

and he had renounced the pleasures of the world. Richard, on the other hand, was still a young man and he was far from home. The defensive strategy was borne out of the realisation that Richard could not be defeated in open battle – and with the increasing dissension in the Christian camp and with pressure on Richard to return to Europe, it was the correct strategy. And so Saladin fortified Jerusalem and waited; when he was informed that the northern approach was vulnerable, he and his sons worked to carry stones to strengthen the walls.

The winter of 1191 was a bitter one. For three months the rain fell incessantly and there was little shelter in Ramla for the Christian army. As Christmas came and went the rain turned to snow and sleet, and the tents were battered by hailstones. Food rotted and men shivered and died. Saladin, in the meantime, waited, for he had no intention of taking the offensive. He had disbanded his army, but the Muslims kept up constant raids against the Christian camp. If Richard wanted Jerusalem he had to march inland and fight for it. On 2 January 1192 Richard gave the order to begin the march on Jerusalem, though it was half-hearted and was probably only done to raise the morale in his army. Richard was now approached by the Templars and the Hospitallers, who urged him to halt the march. If they lost touch with the coast there was the danger of being cut off, they argued, and even if Jerusalem was to fall, what then? As soon as the crusaders had visited the Holy Sepulchre they would return to Europe and Jerusalem would fall once again to Saladin. This was advice which went fundamentally against the whole point of the crusade, but it was borne out of experience and wisdom, and Richard listened. Turn away from Jerusalem, they advised, and fortify Ascalon, for the key was Egypt. Richard then asked for a map of Jerusalem to be brought and having studied it he concluded that the city could not fall to him as long as the Muslims were united. By January, and to the great consternation of many of those in the ranks, Richard turned towards Ascalon. The news of Richard's withdrawal came as little relief to Saladin, for he feared that he would turn his attention to Egypt, and if he did so then Saladin would have no option but to follow. This would be hazardous in the extreme, since with the Franks in control of the sea, Saladin could find himself cut off without supplies. In the meantime, while Richard rebuilt the fortifications of Ascalon, Saladin ordered the evacuation of all women and children from Damietta in Egypt.

Events followed rapidly. In February 1192 Richard was back in Acre in dispute with Conrad. Saladin continued the diplomatic game, dispatching

al-Adil to negotiate. Once again we are uncertain about Saladin's intentions but if the talks dragged on until spring, when the troops of Iraq and Egypt arrived, then so much the better. Saladin himself remained entangled with the issues related to Taqi ul-Din's succession and in mid-May had to send al-Adil across the Euphrates to resolve matters. In May the situation changed again, when news reached Saladin that Conrad was struck down by the Assassins, though it was unclear who was ultimately behind the episode. At the end of May Richard attacked Darum and with its fall he effectively controlled the coast road to Egypt. If, for Saladin, the situation was critical, it would soon become calamitous. In June 1192 Richard was informed by the Bedouin that a huge convoy – it was so large it had been divided into three – was heading out of Egypt. At first Richard was wary and sent two of his men, disguised as Bedouins, to verify matters. When the spies confirmed the news, Richard knew he had to act quickly and on the 24 June he swept down, taking the Muslims by surprise. The victorious Richard could hardly believe his good fortune: 3,000 camels laden with gold, silver and spices fell as booty, and as many horses. In addition numerous weapons – arrows, lances and body armour – were taken. The loss was a disaster for the Muslims and Saladin was inconsolable. News had reached him on the evening of that day after evening prayer, and Ibn Shaddad was present: 'I was sitting in attendance with him. A young man, one of the stable orderlies, brought the news . . . I began to calm and console him, although he was hardly capable of accepting any consolation.' The fact was that Saladin was desperate for reinforcements to relieve his personal troops, who had been campaigning non-stop. The fresh mounts were crucial, as were the weapons. These were now in the possession of Richard, who effectively had free movement and the ability to march on Egypt. If he did, then Saladin would have no option but to pursue him with an army that was increasingly dispirited and fretful. Richard should have moved on to Egypt, but the magnet of Jerusalem was too great to resist. And once more he turned his attention towards the Holy City.

Saladin fortifies Jerusalem

When news reached Saladin of this he ordered that all the wells around the city should be poisoned. Then he called a war council to discuss strategy in this most desperate of times. Present were Turkish and Kurdish amirs and

mamluks, who had served not only Saladin but Shirkuh, veterans of many battles and crises. Ibn Shaddad opened the proceedings and he spoke of the sacred duty of fighting a holy war and of the defence of this most sacred of cities. He then urged that a vow be taken by all present, at the Sacred Rock, that the fight would be to the death. Silence followed his words and so still were the men – each one lost in his thoughts – that in Ibn Shaddad's words it was 'as if a bird perched on each of their heads'. It was Saladin who broke the silence, and his words were concise and to the point, bereft of any rhetoric or flamboyance, for those who surrounded him were those closest to him and all present understood fully what was at stake:

> *Know that today you are the army of Islam and its bulwark, as you are aware that the blood of the Muslims, their property and their offspring depend on your protection. There are no Muslims who can face the enemy but you. If you turn your reins away, which God forbid, they will roll up these lands as* one rolls up a scroll *[Quran xxi, 104]. This is your responsibility, for you are the ones who took on this task and have been supported by public treasury monies. The Muslims in all lands depend on you. My blessings go with you.*

To these words al-Mashtub, who once had vied with Saladin for the vizierate of Egypt and who had been imprisoned at Acre, replied that they would fight to the death. Like Saladin, al-Mashtub was a Kurd and his defiant words were perhaps inspired by a sense of pride in front of the Turks present. Although Saladin was reassured by his support, he noted that the others remained silent. The meeting then broke up, though no vow was taken. Later the same evening Saladin received a note from Abul Huija the Gross. There was much anxiety, he informed Saladin, about what might happen if Jerusalem was besieged, for the memory of what had taken place at Acre was still very much alive. If he wanted them to defend Jerusalem then they would do so, but he would have to remain in the city with them. Saladin immediately replied that he would remain, but was advised that this was far too dangerous.

That night was a long night and Ibn Shaddad remained with Saladin until dawn. The words of Abul Huija the Gross had brought great anxiety to Saladin, for he was certain that Richard would soon attack Jerusalem. Now his own men had told him that they would not defend the city unless he remained behind. In addition, the troops which he urgently needed from

Iraq were taking their time to arrive and he suspected it was because they wanted to avoid a possible siege. For him it meant only one thing: Jerusalem was going to be lost. Towards Jerusalem, Ibn Shaddad wrote, Saladin felt a great concern that would move mountains. That night Ibn Shaddad tried to relieve Saladin's anxiety, and the two men prayed together until dawn broke. Later that day, as Ibn Shaddad performed the Friday communal prayer at al-Aqsa mosque, he noticed Saladin praying: 'I saw him prostrating himself and repeating words with tears pouring down on to his prayer mat'. All expected the first attack on the city would take place the next day as Richard received reinforcements.

The attack never came. On the Friday evening, 3 July, a report arrived from Izz al-Din Jurdik, who was stationed with the advanced detachment, in which he declared that the enemy had mounted but then had returned to their tents. Saladin perhaps did not know how disunited the crusading force were. As he had done previously, Richard tested opinion, and the local knights once again argued against attacking Jerusalem. The water supplies were poisoned, they pointed out, and it was the height of summer. Other arguments were now made: as long as Richard was outnumbered by the Muslims then Jerusalem was an impossible target. Only a massive influx of new settlers could ensure that Jerusalem was retained as a Christian city. Otherwise what would be gained today would be lost tomorrow. If an attack had to take place, it should be in the direction of Egypt. But even that idea was increasingly fanciful, for the French, under Hugh of Burgundy, saw no reason to follow an English king. They even camped apart from the other crusaders and their camp echoed with anti-Richard songs. Only by the capture of Jerusalem could Richard hope to have maintained their support. But they certainly had no intention of following him in what they perceived as an Angevin adventure in Egypt, and when it was announced that there would be no attack on Jerusalem, they were the first to commence the march back to the coast. As far as they were concerned, the crusade was over and Richard of England had betrayed them.[3]

Diplomatically Richard remained defiant, 'the ram draws back to butt' he had threatened, but this was mere diplomatic face-saving. An envoy from Henry of Champagne, whom Richard had appointed as the king of the Latin Kingdom, arrived at Saladin's court and the message remained defiant: 'Restore to me my lands so that I may make peace with you'. Ibn Shaddad, who was an eyewitness, noted that Saladin was raised to a fury by

this demand and almost struck the envoy before having him removed. No matter Henry's posture, the tide had turned in Saladin's favour and Richard had little choice but to open negotiations. He was prepared to abandon his claim to Jerusalem, except for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and free access for pilgrims. The stumbling block – and a reflection of its strategic position vis-à-vis Jerusalem – was Ascalon. Although the crusaders had attempted to refortify it, it was a shadow of its formidable past, but Richard insisted on retaining it, as it would give him a grip on Egypt. Saladin naturally was never going to accept this demand. He, too, wanted peace, as his army's morale was as low as it had ever been and his empire almost bankrupt. Eventually he agreed to offer Lydda by way of compensation, but Ascalon could not remain under the control of Richard. In any case he was not in a hurry to conclude matters – he knew that Richard was desperate to return to England where urgent matters awaited him, and Saladin was being strengthened daily as troops flooded in. On 22 July 1192 Richard, having dismantled Darum and placed 300 Templars and Hospitallers in the garrison of Ascalon, withdrew to Acre and many thought that he was setting sail for home. In fact he was preparing to attack Beirut, thereby ensuring that the coast was totally in Frankish hands.

The attack on Jaffa and the defiance of Richard

At once Saladin responded. He dispatched Al-Afdal with troops from Mosul and Sinjar to defend Beirut; and meanwhile he commanded his Turkish and Kurdish troops and took the offensive, his right wing commanded by al-Zahir and the left commanded by al-Adil. The target was Jaffa and Saladin was certain the city would fall easily, but the resistance was stiffer than he anticipated. For four days the garrison resisted, until finally a breach was made and the Muslims broke into the town, with the Christian soldiers retreating to the citadel. Envoys came to discuss surrender terms and they requested that Saladin hold his men back, but he replied that he was unable to do so since the urge for plunder was too strong. He advised the Christians to retire to the citadel so as not to be harmed. When they had done so, Jaffa was ransacked. At the same time Saladin accepted the formal surrender of the city on the same terms as he had taken from Jerusalem. Later the same afternoon he received news that Richard had given up his march on Beirut and was heading to rescue Jaffa. Although the French

contingent refused to aid him, he had gathered a force of English and Angevin knights and had set off by galley. The knights marched down the coast but in fact were held up and Richard, unawares, sailed virtually alone to confront Saladin's army. At dawn the sound of trumpets heralded the arrival of Richard to Jaffa, and at once Saladin ordered Ibn Shaddad to pass the news to Saladin's son al-Zahir and to tell him to take position outside the south gate. Ibn Shaddad rushed to al-Zahir: 'I woke him up and he rose with sleep still in his eyes'. At the same time Saladin became increasingly anxious to take over the citadel, and although a number of knights surrendered and were given safe conduct, the sighting of Richard's galley, painted red, covered with a red awning and flying a red flag, encouraged the remainder to continue the fight for the citadel. Barely had the galley reached shore than Richard, still in his boating shoes, leapt into the sea brandishing an axe and roaring with fury. It was a formidable sight and a display of courage which terrified the watching Muslims, who scattered. While Richard landed, Saladin was unaware of what was taking place, as he was negotiating with the envoys of Jaffa for the surrender of the citadel. Ibn Shaddad rushed back: 'I whispered in his ear what had happened, so he stopped writing and kept them busy in conversation'. Within two days Saladin had taken Jaffa with a force of 60,000 and Richard had retaken it with less than 3,000.

That day Richard was in fine form, taunting that Saladin, the greatest leader in Islam, had run away while he, Richard, had not even removed his boating shoes. But he also revealed that urgent matters meant that he had to return to England, and once again the bargaining commenced. Saladin agreed that the Franks could keep the coast from Caesarea to Tyre and he agreed that Richard could keep Jaffa, but there was no negotiation over Ascalon. On 2 August Richard sent a message to Saladin once again requesting Ascalon. If terms could be agreed, the envoy claimed that Richard would leave within six days, but that otherwise he would winter on the coast. Saladin coolly replied that Ascalon would not be given up and Richard was most welcome to winter on the coast:

> *If it is easy for him to winter here and to be far from his family and homeland, two months' travelling time away, when he is a young man in the flower of his youth and at a time when he seeks his pleasures, how easy is it for me to spend a winter, a summer, then a winter and another summer in the middle of my own lands, surrounded by my sons and family.*

Time was not on the side of the king of England.

In the meantime the Muslim army had withdrawn to Ramla. But when, on 4 August, Saladin heard that Richard was camping outside Jaffa with few tents and a small force, he at once decided on a surprise attack to seize the king of England. Thus he set out in the first part of the night, with Bedouin guides preceding him. It is estimated that Richard had no more than 17 horses and less than 1,000 foot soldiers, but when the Muslims charged, the Franks held firm. 'Like dogs of war they snarled, willing to fight to the death. Our troops were frightened of them, dumbfounded by their steadfastness', wrote Ibn Shaddad. It was during this clash that Richard's horse was slain, and Saladin sent him two horses as it was unfitting for a king to fight on foot. The Muslim forces then withdrew and surrounded the camp, and Saladin ordered them to charge again, but his men refused. Of his men, only his son al-Zahir charged. The rest of the Muslim troops refused to charge. That day Richard was in his element. Lance in hand he rode along the whole length of the Muslim army, but not one of the Muslim soldiers dared attack him. Psychologically it was a devastating blow for Saladin, who was faced by a near-mutiny. To prevent any further loss of face, he moved off in fury. Such was his anger that day that many of those who had refused to attack were convinced that they would be crucified. Even al-Zahir, the only one who had attacked, was terrified of his father and recalled how he did not have the courage to enter his father's tent. When finally summoned, he entered with trepidation, to find that a quantity of fruit had arrived from Damascus. 'Send for the amirs', Saladin requested and it was clear that his anger had dissipated, 'and let them taste this fruit.'

Al Janah, al Mashtub's brother, had rebuked Saladin and told him that the troops refusal to attack was due to their anger at missing their chance of booty at Jaffa, but the fact was Saladin's anger had been replaced by a weary realisation that his men would fight no more. Saladin himself had been on campaign for five years and though his soul continued to burn with the desire to fight the holy war, he could not expect his men to follow. Throughout his empire there was an acute shortage of food and his land was ruined. His men were weary and tired and in debt. Al-Qadi al-Fadil, who had remained in Egypt, wrote to him and, as usual, captured the moment precisely: 'None among all the Muslims will help in the holy war except by empty words. No one will follow you except for money.' It is universally accepted that Saladin's greatest achievement was his capture of Jerusalem

but that achievement pales into insignificance in comparison to his ability to hold his disparate army together in the field for five years. He himself had hinted at this when he exclaimed that 'If I were to die, it is very unlikely that these soldiers would ever come together again', but he now understood that the troops would fight no more.

The arrival of al-Mansur, son of Taqi ul-Din, was always going to cause a certain amount of trepidation, for not only had he defied Saladin but had rebelled against him and consequently caused great trouble. But now he rode into Saladin's camp, at the head of his men, ready for the holy war. It was al-Zahir who first greeted him and, when the moment was opportune, he was escorted into Saladin's tent. If he had been apprehensive about the reception he would get, he need not have worried, for Saladin rose to greet him and he embraced him for a long time. And perhaps because he resembled his father, or perhaps because in his manner there was a likeness, Saladin began to weep 'in a way that had never been seen before', for the sight of al-Mansur reminded him of his nephew.

Peace negotiations and the departure of Richard

In the meantime Richard had fallen ill, seriously ill. The astonishing feats of bravery and his boundless energy had taken its toll and now he lay incapacitated. The French were preparing to return home, further debilitating his forces, but he continued to rage and, close to death, he sent defiant messages to Saladin, though on at least one occasion he also requested some fruit and snow for his fever. Saladin, true to his nature, sent the fruit, but when one of his advance guard reported how weak the defences of Jaffa were, Saladin once more attempted to rally his troops to advance on the city. 'Unlike other princes', he said, 'I do not prefer a life of ease to the holy war.' There is no doubt that Saladin would have continued fighting until Richard had set sail, and this perhaps was the conclusive proof that his dedication to the holy war was sincere, for he continued to be defiant when others had given up. But there was no march on Jaffa; rapidly his amirs persuaded him that, if pushed, the Franks would continue to fight, but if a truce could be agreed, they would depart.

The terms of the truce were drawn up. The Franks would have the country from Jaffa to Tyre, but not Ramla and Lydda and some other towns. Richard demanded compensation for Ascalon, and eventually Saladin agreed

that the revenues of Ramla and Lydda would be shared. As for Ascalon, it would be demolished and both sides would confirm that this had been done. This was a truce – not peace – and the truce, it was agreed, would run for three years and eight months, after which hostilities would resume. Till the end, Saladin remained reluctant to the terms, since he feared that when hostilities did resume the Muslim leaders would not unite as they had done:

> *I do not know what will happen to me and the enemy will grow strong. He has those lands left to him [referring to the coastal cities] so that he can come out to recover the rest. You will see all the Muslim leaders sitting at the top of their towers and saying 'I shall not come down', and the Muslims would be destroyed.*

But the fighting was over for the time being. When the terms were presented to Richard, he was too ill to read them and simply declared, 'I have made peace: here is my hand'. The new king of the Latin Kingdom, Henry of Champagne, and other Franks took the oath, and on the same day al-Adil, Al-Afdal and al-Zahir as well as other amirs swore the oath. Later, Saladin held a reception and peace was proclaimed.

And finally it was over – a debilitating exhausting war that had ruined the land and caused tremendous upheaval. No side had won. Saladin had remained defiant and Jerusalem had not fallen but Richard had secured vital coastal routes through which new armies could pour in. The two armies had fought each other to a standstill and the two central figures, Richard and Saladin, so different in character and abilities, had remained resolute and defiant to the end. A final incident as Richard was leaving captures their characters eloquently. 'Do not think I am not returning', warned Richard, 'and when I do I will take Jerusalem'. To this warning Saladin replied that if he had to lose Jerusalem he would rather lose it to Richard than to any other. Christian pilgrims flooded into Jerusalem, as the terms of the truce allowed them to. Richard himself chose not to make the pilgrimage and the two men would never meet: it was the Bishop of Salisbury who led the pilgrims to the holy places. But when Richard asked that the French be refused access, Saladin ignored him and allowed all those who wished to visit to do so. He had no intention of entering into the disputes of the Christians; his accommodating behaviour and welcome of the pilgrims was partly due to his generous nature and also to the fact that he wanted as many pilgrims to pass through so that they could finally depart. Meanwhile Richard had

moved to Acre, where his health slowly improved, and from there he set sail. The Lionheart had finally departed.

The Third Crusade was a succession of military reverses for Saladin and a catalogue of debilitating and fractious internal struggles among his amirs, which often verged on mutinies. The massacre at Acre had shaken him up considerably and he had been unable to prevent Richard's inexorable march down the coast. At the end, he was forced to destroy the cities which he had conquered, to prevent them from falling to Richard, including his precious Ascalon. And yet, in that dark hour, as he fortified himself in Jerusalem awaiting the final assault, Saladin had realised an achievement which was even greater than his victory at Hattin. To have won Jerusalem for the sake of the holy war was a considerable feat, to have not lost it was an even greater one. In the words of Gibb, 'It was by sheer force of personality, by the undying flame of faith within him, and by his example of steadfast endurance, that he inspired the dogged resistance which finally wore down the invaders'.[4]

Chapter 15

Death in Damascus: Saladin's Last Days

Tonight Yusuf has left the prison. This world is the prison of the believer and the paradise of the disbeliever.

Al-Qadi al-Qadi al-Fadil

Saladin remained in Jerusalem until he was certain that Richard had departed Acre for Europe. The past few years had taken a terrible toll on his health, brought on by the depression – one is tempted to say the trauma – induced by the Third Crusade.[1] When Ibn Shaddad suggested that it was time that he performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, which was a religious obligation for all Muslims, he readily agreed and preparations began to be made as to who would accompany him. It was the sage al-Qadi al-Fadil, however, who saw the bigger political picture and the implications involved and who approached Saladin and advised that perhaps it was not the best time for him to go on pilgrimage. He pointed out that Saladin had not informed the caliph of his intention and that a move towards Mecca might be seized upon and misinterpreted in Baghdad by those who misinterpret such matters. In any case the danger of the Franks had not passed completely and Jerusalem remained vulnerable. The empire was as exhausted as its sultan, he explained. Disturbances over the lack of food and the administrative abuses had broken out in Damascus, and in Cairo there had even been pro-Fatimid demonstrations. A special tax had been proposed to raise money for the bankrupt chancery, but it had been insufficient to meet the

needs of the war, and in Alexandria foreign traders were forced to pay taxes of up to 25 per cent of the value of the goods. Perhaps Saladin should reconsider and not go this year, for matters had not yet settled. As was often the case, Saladin listened to the words of his old friend and decided to postpone his pilgrimage to the following year. In fact he would never perform this religious obligation. In the meantime he insisted, against the advice of his doctor, to make up the days of fasting which he had missed. Al-Qadi al-Fadil had kept a record of how many days Saladin had been unable to fast due to illness, and he now fasted 'for more than a month' while in Jerusalem, to make up for the lost days.

The return to Damascus

In November 1192 Saladin returned to Damascus. This was the first time since April 1189 that he had returned to the city that had become his centre of power. He briefly thought about continuing on to Egypt but instead decided to spend the winter in Syria. Shortly afterwards al-Adil arrived, and he could not but notice a marked deterioration in Saladin's health. The brothers spent time together and for up to two weeks they rode into the desert to hunt gazelle. At night and under the stars they talked about many things. Egypt was an important subject; as a young man Saladin had vowed never to return to that land but he had grown to love it. The country's contribution to his war effort had been nothing short of prodigious, as nearly three-quarters of its national expenditure had been spent on supplying him with troops and weapons. Without Egypt, Jerusalem would never have fallen to him, and without Egypt, Jerusalem would have been lost. The two brothers were convinced that once the truce was over the Franks would come again, but that this time their focus would be on the land of the Nile. The events of the past few months had proven that, and Egypt's defences needed urgently to be overhauled. But as the brothers talked, al-Adil was struck by how hard Saladin found it to concentrate and this worried him greatly. But it also made him think, for though he had served his brother with great loyalty he remained unconvinced by his eldest nephew and heir apparent, al-Afdal, who struck him as being arrogant, and this began to play on his mind. When the hunting trip was over al-Adil returned to his lands, which lay on the other side of the Euphrates, and it was agreed that with the onset of spring Saladin would travel to Egypt. The two brothers would not meet again.

In the meantime al-Afdal, as his uncle feared, was increasingly becoming the centre of the court attention and many followers-on flocked to him. At the end of the winter, in February 1193, Ibn Shaddad arrived from Jerusalem and walked into the sultan's chamber, only to find al-Afdal surrounded by his supporters, for Saladin had chosen to remain in his private chambers. The sight of al-Afdal sitting where Saladin often sat disturbed Ibn Shaddad, and he moved silently away and headed for the private chamber, where he requested permission to enter. It had been four months since the two men had met and Saladin greeted and hugged his companion warmly, with tears in his eyes. But the signs of the deterioration in his health worried Ibn Shaddad, who noted that Saladin's movements were lethargic and that he found it hard to concentrate. The following day Ibn Shaddad arrived in the garden where Saladin was seated with his young children. One of them, Abu Bakr, was clearly his favourite and was seated on his knee. Saladin was informed that a Frankish envoy had arrived with a message and he ordered that he be brought to the garden. When the Frank entered though, the young Abu Bakr was so scared of this beardless man that he burst into tears and the envoy was asked to leave for a few minutes. Saladin then had a light meal with Ibn Shaddad, but as the latter took his leave he noted that a lassitude hung over Saladin's actions. 'I took my leave of him, not having found him to be as lively as I had known him.'

Saladin's illness

On 20 February, three days after he arrived in Damascus, Ibn Shaddad rode out to greet the returning pilgrims, as was the custom. It was a raw day, with a bitterly cold wind. The arrival of the returning pilgrims was always a festive occasion and as the crowds gathered Ibn Shaddad spotted Saladin in the distance, but on trying to approach him he was sidetracked by al-Afdal, who wished to speak to him on a matter. As the two men spoke, Ibn Shaddad glanced over in the direction of Saladin and noticed with surprise that he had forgotten to wear his quilted jacket. This alarmed him greatly and he broke away from his conversation and urged Saladin to put his jacket on. Once again he was struck by the lack of concentration, and he wrote that it was as if Saladin was waking up from a dream. For some reason the jacket could not be found, and the day passed. But the chill remained and the following day Saladin was running a high temperature. By now al-Qadi

al-Fadil and Ibn Shaddad were in constant attendance. The illness was getting worse, though Ibn Shaddad was moved by the humility of Saladin. On the fourth day of his illness he was bled. On the sixth day of the illness he called for some water to drink. First it was too hot and then it was too cold, but Ibn Shaddad remarked that Saladin did not get angry, simply remarking, 'Is there no one here who can make water of the right temperature?' The illness was worsening and Saladin's mind was drifting. By the ninth day he stopped taking any liquid and a feverish shiver gripped him and he was barely conscious. It was clear he was dying.

Fear spread across the city and the traders began to store their goods, since no one knew what would happen if Saladin were to die. Every evening al-Qadi al-Fadil and Ibn Shaddad travelled to Saladin's chambers and the people watched them closely, for the level of anxiety etched on their faces reflected the gravity of the sultan's illness. On the eleventh day Saladin was too ill to receive any visitors and al-Afdal offered to accommodate the two men for the night, but al-Qadi al-Fadil insisted that they leave the citadel, as they did every night, since their absence would make people think that the worst had happened and disturbances would follow. In the meantime the jostling for power had commenced; al-Afdal asked that the amirs publicly swear allegiance to him and some did but others, seeking assurances, did not. Ominously, no attempt was made to get the allegiance from the amirs of Egypt, Aleppo and Mesopotamia, since it was acknowledged that for the time being no allegiance would be sworn.

Saladin's death and the mourning of the people

On 4 March 1193 Saladin was drifting in and out of consciousness. With him was the imam Abu Jafar, who was reciting verses from the Quran, and fittingly also present was al-Qadi al-Fadil, Saladin's most trusted companion. For 25 years the two men had complemented each other, though they were in so many ways different: a Kurdish military warrior and a hunchbacked Palestinian bureaucrat. They shared a vision and that vision had endured and transcended their differences. Now, as al-Qadi al-Fadil sat near, the imam recited, and when he had completed the verse 'He is God other than whom there is no other god, who knows what is invisible and what is visible', a smile broke out on Saladin's face and he mumbled 'It is true', before passing away, aged 55.

That day Saladin's sons went into the streets of Damascus to receive the condolences of the people. There was great consternation in the city and then, as the news spread, it carried the consternation with it across the lands. It was the only time, an observer remarked, that a ruler's death had been truly mourned by his people. Saladin died leaving in his treasury in gold and silver only 40 Nasiri dirhams and a single Tyrian gold piece. As Ibn Shaddad wrote, the powerful Saladin left behind no house, no estate, no orchard, no village, not a single item of property of any sort. There was not enough money to pay for his funeral. Not even enough to buy straw with which his tomb was lined, and the cost had to be borrowed. Al-Afdal held the condolence in the north vaulted hall, and the gates for the citadel were barred to all except the elite amirs and the ulama. After the midday prayer the body was washed and shrouded. A jurist named al-Dawlai washed the body, but when Ibn Shaddad was asked to supervise he found that was unable to bear the sight and excused himself. It was then discovered that money could not be found to buy the shroud or the straw with which to line the coffin and it was al-Qadi al-Fadil who, on that day, covered the funeral costs. And that was perhaps the final paradox in a life full of paradoxes. The most powerful man in the Islamic world, Saladin died effectively penniless. Most famous for his victory at Hattin, he was not a great general. The ruler of a vast empire, he was a poor administrator. The champion of Islamic orthodoxy, his theology was a simple one. When times dictated quick decisions, he was cautious. These are not the ingredients for greatness, but there can be no dispute that there was a genius to Saladin and the outpouring of grief which surrounded his death is proof that his contemporaries recognised a quality which we – standing on the shores of history and gazing over an ocean of words and events – can only glimpse at. 'Men grieved for him as they grieve for prophets', wrote a contemporary of Saladin. 'He was loved by good and bad, Muslim and unbeliever alike.' As for Ibn Shaddad, he had been won over by Saladin's qualities and his heartfelt words have the power to move us with their sincerity:

> *I had heard from some people that they were desirous of ransoming those dear to them with their own lives, but I only ever heard such an expression as a sort of exaggeration or poetic licence until this day, as I know for myself and for others that, had the purchase of his life been acceptable, we would have paid for it with our own.*

Saladin: an assessment

When all the myths and legends are stripped away, when all the sound and fury of sieges and wars pass, we are left with a profoundly simple man – and therein lay Saladin's greatness. A simple man but certainly not a simpleton nor a fool, for he would have hardly survived if he had been. He was a child of the Sunni Revival, and he was a faithful and loyal child. As Cahen concludes, Saladin was inconceivable without Nizam ul-Mulk.[2] As a young man Saladin had been taught a creed by al-Nishapuri, and he taught it to his children. He had understood that the building of madrasas was a manifestation of the new orthodoxy, and he built many madrasas. He believed that the holy war was an incumbent duty, and he pursued it with a doggedness and resoluteness which saw him pleading and cajoling for one final assault on Jaffa; a doggedness which made him refuse to leave Jerusalem until he was certain that Richard had finally departed. And perhaps the greatest reflection of what his contemporaries felt about him was, as Gibb noted, that year after year the Mosul contingents, who detested Saladin for being an Ayyubid usurper, returned for active service, even if they sometimes lingered on the way.[3] Saladin could not have forced them to come, nor could he have restrained them if they had chosen to depart. There can be no explanation of this except that there was a feeling of personal loyalty to Saladin and to the ideals and vision in which he so sincerely believed. Jerusalem had come to symbolise this ideal and vision; its capture had legitimised his claim to be the champion of the holy war and had silenced – partly at least – those who had accused him of being an Ayyubid usurper. But more than the capture of Jerusalem, it was Saladin's dogged and determined defence in the face of Richard's encroachment, and at a time when he could have chosen to retire to Egypt, that demonstrates his sincerity. Saladin was not a deep thinker but what he believed in he believed in deeply and with great sincerity. In ordinary people such a quality would be admirable, but in men of great power it becomes an irresistible force that drags people with it in its tide.

And yet moral sincerity is not enough in itself to explain Saladin's success, nor is it enough to account for the 'glue' which held his empire together.[4] Sincerity and a vision, no matter how profound, cannot fully explain how it was that Saladin maintained the loyalty of those around him and over whom he had little control. The fact was that he was gifted with a geniality and

a remarkable ability to win people over, often to the astonishment of his advisers. Unlike Zengi, Saladin did not rule by fear, in fact people often wearied him with their demands, and on more than one occasion his cushion was trodden on as those in his audience jostled him with petitions. He may not have possessed the austerity of Nur al-Din – though he shared his ascetic nature – and that was to his advantage, since austerity rarely wins people over. Nur al-Din's court was a solemn one, while Saladin's was a noisy rambunctious affair. On one occasion a jurist visiting Saladin's court was so offended by the noise and familiarity with which people addressed each other – including Saladin himself – that he took his leave, only to be persuaded to return on the promise that a better decorum would be kept. Saladin was a usurper who had no legitimate right to rule, in fact he had no better right to rule than any of the amirs who surrounded him, nor any 'claim to their gratitude'.[5] And yet his amirs served him and he had to face only a few cases of personal discontent. Even if, as Humphreys points out, some disgruntled amir had tried to mount a conspiracy against him, the amir would have found no faction at hand to support him.[6]

In many ways Saladin was an outsider; he was a Kurd in the age of Turks and an Ayyubid at a time of Zengids. And yet in an age of self-interested, ephemeral alliances and perfidious promises he rose to become the most powerful man in the land and he did so almost seamlessly. He managed to baffle his enemies, who expected him to be motivated by the same motives as they were, and were surprised how simple and humble he was. People wearied him with demands because they knew he would not turn them away, and the Franks who came across him were astounded by his generosity. No reasonable request was turned down and once he gave his word he never broke it – as Reynald of Chatillon found out to his cost. He used money to win people's hearts and to cool their anger, and he used it liberally and his clear disinterest in material benefit for himself won him admiration. But even money could go so far; Saladin had a genius for winning people over, flattering them, persuading them, cajoling them until they did his biding. It was this ability, coupled with the sincerity of his beliefs, that won the hearts of those who had sworn never to serve him. The Zengids had viewed him as a dog that barked at his master, and yet he won the services of both Aleppo and Mosul, and he did so without the shedding of blood.

There are many examples of how Saladin soothed the ire of an amir and won him over, but the best example is probably that of Ibn al-Muqaddam.

As we have seen, he had been faced by a tricky situation when his brother, Turan Shah, had insisted on being given Baalbek after Saladin had had him removed from the governorship of Damascus. Ibn al-Muqaddam, however, refused to budge. This posed a serious challenge for Saladin; on the one hand he could not permit any amir to oppose his authority; on the other, he could not be seen to be penalising a man to whom he owed so much and who was merely defending his rights. Had he failed in either respect, as Humphreys concludes, he would have lost the loyalty of the hereditary amirs at least and perhaps of any who were in some sense independent of him.[7] All eyes were on him, but Saladin did not fail. Having marched his army to Baalbek as a show of force, he spent his time hunting, before sitting down with Ibn al-Muqaddam. The interesting point is that though Ibn al-Muqaddam was compelled to surrender Baalbek, he neither fled to the service of another sovereign nor stood trial as a rebel.[8] On the contrary, not only did he continue to serve Saladin with great loyalty, but, following the death of Saladin's nephew, he was appointed as governor of Damascus, a post which had to date been exclusively held by Saladin's relatives. However, a diplomatic and conciliatory nature should not be mistaken for weakness, and on occasion Saladin's amirs needed to be kept in place. For example, he severely punished his Kurdish troops after the defeat of Mont Gisard; while his son, al-Zahir, feared his father so much on the day the Muslims had failed to attack a defenceless Richard that he was convinced that any of the amirs who crossed Saladin's path that day would have been crucified.

In his biography of Saladin, Ehrenkreutz challenges the reader with a hypothetical question in which he asks them to assume, 'for the sake of argument',[9] that Saladin had died from a serious illness that struck him in 1185. What then, he writes, would have been his historical legacy? Putting aside the fact that to understand a man's life one needs to study it in its totality, there is in Ehrenkreutz's question an implicit assumption, one that partly reflects the West's obsession with the Crusades,[10] which confuses fame with achievement. Largely a Western phenomenon, it is not surprising that, to date, most scholarship on the subject of the crusades has been unabashedly eurocentric,[11] and from that springs the natural assumption that Saladin's greatest achievements occurred when he was in direct confrontation with the West. He is therefore best remembered for the Third Crusade and his war of attrition with Richard, even though this period

actually reveals very little that we did not know about him. A more subtle reading of his life supports Gibb's claim that it is natural, when a man accomplishes some great work, to imagine that this was what he had set as his goal.[12] Gibb writes of a 'distant goal' on which Saladin's eyes were fixed, which allowed him to achieve as much as he did and which later generations assumed to have been his whole purpose. Above all, that goal was the upholding of Sunni orthodoxy and the combatting of religious heresy, and it was inward-looking within the Islamic fold. A traditional focus on the Crusades – which has been the case with all the biographies of Saladin – cannot give a full picture of his historical legacy, which is far more enduring than the one with which he is more famously associated. Certainly it can be argued that Saladin's greatest achievement was his defeat of the Franks and his conquest of Jerusalem, and it can be equally argued that a greater achievement was his defence of the same city and his holding together of his demoralised army. But in truth his greatest achievement lay elsewhere, and that was in his restoration of Sunnism in Egypt. This was not simply a political and military restoration but a theological and ideological one, as represented in the dynamic programme of madrasa building, which moved the country firmly into the Sunni orbit and which produced armies of madrasa graduates as comfortable in the pulpits as they were in administration. And proof that this was ultimately his greatest achievement was that it was those Franks who knew the region best and who were the most sincere in their crusading zeal – the Hospitallers and the Templars – who constantly urged their kings, Amalric, Baldwin, Richard, that though the prize of the struggle was Jerusalem, the key was Egypt.

Al-Adil's doubts about al-Afdal were proven correct. His eyes had glazed over when his father spoke – as he did endlessly – about the holy war; after all, had the Franks not been pushed back to the coast? And though he continued in his father's steps by constructing a madrasa in Jerusalem in 1194, he was in many ways not his father's son. For example, he dismissed Ibn Shaddad, al-Isfahani and al-Qadi al-Fadil, the three men closest to Saladin and the zealous and jealous guardians of his legacy. Perhaps he wanted his own men around him, but nothing symbolised more the passing of an era than this act. So what became of the three men? The aristocratic Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, now an old man, chose to remain in Damascus. More than anyone he had realised the jurist/administrator ideal that Nizam

ul-Mulk had dreamt of; he had studied at the Nizamiyya in Baghdad and then served Ibn Hubayra, Nur al-Din and Saladin. Once he had complained of his poverty and now poverty would visit him again, and it is said that he never left his house in his later years. He died in 1201 and was buried in an unmarked grave in a sufi cemetery, next to Saladin's tomb.

Baha ul-Din Ibn Shaddad left Damascus for Aleppo. He was at a reasonably young age when Saladin had died and he went on to pursue a successful career, and for a period was the chief administrator of Aleppo. His fame attracted many visitors who flocked to his house, after the Friday prayer, to study the hadith of the Prophet from him. He suffered the cold badly and had a blazing brazier burning in his house at all times, which caused great discomfort to his visitors but to which he appeared oblivious. Ibn Khallikan gives a touching picture of Ibn Shaddad as an old man, 'as weak as a little bird just hatched', wearing a fur lined coat. Ibn Shaddad lived to an old age – old enough to see Jerusalem handed back to the Franks – and he died in 1234, in his ninetieth year. In his will he bequeathed his house to a sufi fraternity.

As for al-Qadi al-Fadil, he returned to Egypt, where he had spent most of his life and from where he had served Saladin with great loyalty and wisdom. For a while he served as a senior administrator, before disputes between Saladin's sons drove him away. He died in 1199, having fittingly spent the evening in his madrasa. It was al-Qadi al-Fadil who had been the real brains and the intellectual driving force behind Saladin. Saladin once claimed that he had conquered the lands not by his sword but by al-Qadi al-Fadil's pen. And thanks to al-Fadil's skills as a propagandist, he also conquered history.

Upon his return to Damascus in 1192, Saladin was greeted warmly by his family. His sons travelled to be with him, including al-Zahir, his favourite, who came down from Aleppo. It was the month of Ramadan and the occasion was a joyful one, full of tender moments. After the sun had set and the fast had been broken, al-Zahir took leave and departed the city. Then for some reason he stopped and turned back, where he sought another audience with his father. In the words of Ibn Shaddad, who had accompanied him, 'It was as though his noble soul felt that the end of the sultan's allotted span was near'. Saladin and his son stayed till dawn talking, and when finally the time came for al-Zahir to leave, Saladin embraced him and ran

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his hand over his son's face and kissed him. Then he spoke some words of advice and, perhaps because they were words spoken by a father to a son, they were heartfelt:

> *I charge you to fear God Almighty, for He is the source of all good. I command you to do what God has commanded, for that is the means of your salvation. I warn you against shedding blood, indulging in it and making a habit of it, for blood never sleeps. I charge you to care for the hearts of your subjects and to examine their affairs. You are my trustee and God's trustee to guard their interests. I charge you to care for the hearts of amirs and men of state and magnates. I have only achieved what I have by coaxing people. Hold no grudge against anyone, for death spares nobody. Take care in your relations with people, for only if they are satisfied will you be forgiven, and also in your relations with God, for God will only be forgiving if you repent to Him, and He is gracious.*

Notes

Prologue: Separating the Man from the Myth

1 S. Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, London 1898, 399.
2 M. Jubb, *The Legend of Saladin in Western Literature and Historiography*, New York 2000, xi.
3 Ibid., 6.
4 Ibid., 40.
5 Ibid., 92.
6 C. Rosebault, *Saladin Prince of Chivalry*, London 1930, 5.
7 C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades through Islamic Perspectives*, Edinburgh 1999, 592.
8 C. Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom*, Oxford 2004, 195.
9 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 592.
10 A. Ahmad, *Living Islam*, London 1995, 76.
11 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 595.
12 E. Said, 'These are the Realities', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 19 April 2001.
13 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 614.
14 A. Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, Albany 1972.
15 H. Gibb, 'The Achievement of Saladin', *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 35/1, Marchester 1952, 44–60.

Chapter 1 The Weakening of the Abbasid Caliph and the Sunni Revival

1 The Samanids in Khurasan, the Hamdanids in Syria, the Umayyads in Spain, the Fatimids in Egypt and the Ghaznavids in Afghanistan.
2 For years the Abbasid caliphs assigned revenues of certain lands (iqta) to their military governors (amirs), who in return undertook to provide the caliph with

a number of troops or a sum of money. The problem was that the granting of land in lieu of salary could only lead to fragmentation and the weakening of the central administration, and the irony became that the men and money required, in order for the centre to hold, ultimately caused its collapse.

3 J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, London 1965, 134.
4 S.H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, London 1966, 147.
5 G. Makdisi, 'The Sunni Revival', in D. Richards (ed.), *Islamic Civilization 950–1150*, Oxford 1973, 165.
6 P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph*, Cambridge 1986, 90.
7 R. Humphreys, *Islamic History*, Princeton 1991, 187. Having said that, and keeping in mind that there existed no fixed boundaries or specialisations, it can generally be accepted that the ulama were largely divided into three groups; the legal scholar (faqih) whose focus was on the application of Islamic law; the scholar of hadith (muhaddith) whose work emphasised the transmission of hadith, the Prophet's sayings; and the mystic (sufi) who devoted himself primarily to the esoteric dimension of the religion. In medieval Islam, however, religion and law were inseparable and the ulama who administered the religious law were also proficient in the transmission of hadith and were themselves sufis.
8 Saunders, op. cit., 125.
9 M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Chicago 1961, vol. 2, 33.
10 H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, London 1986, 229.
11 In 765, with the death of Jafar al-Sadiq, the sixth imam after Ali, the Shiite community split. Jafar's son and heir, Ismail, had died before his father, and while some recognised Ismail's younger brother, Musa al-Kazim, others recognised Ismail's son Muhammad as the imam. They became known as Ismailis or Sevener Shiite. Those Shiites who followed Musa al-Kazim became known as the Twelver Shiite and compose the great majority of Shiites today.
12 S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 2 *The Kingdom of Jerusalem*, London 1952, 12.
13 Kennedy, op. cit., 242.
14 Saunders, op. cit., 147.
15 P. Newby, *Saladin in his Time*, London 1983, 36.
16 Makdisi, op. cit., 157.
17 Nasr, op. cit., 96.
18 For the purpose of this book, the plural of madhab will be madhabs.
19 Hodgson, op. cit., 152.
20 It must be noted that legal school affiliations were often not mentioned unless the individual in question was involved in a legal career; the madhabs of sufis, poets and grammarians were subsequently rarely listed.
21 I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, Princeton 1981, 92. An example of this was clearly demonstrated by the Hanbali Shaykh Ibn Taymiya who, preaching about God's descent, descended himself from the pulpit and said, 'Exactly as I am descending now'.

22 Ibid., 94.
23 For an opposing view of the development of Asharism, see G. Makdisi, 'Ash'ari and the Ash'arites in Islamic Religious History', *Studia Islamica*, XVII, 1962.
24 G. Makdisi, 'The Hanbali School and Sufism', *Boletin de la Asociacion Espanola de Orientatlistas XV*, Madrid 1979, 116.
25 Hodgson, op. cit., 194.
26 Al-Ghazali, *Letter to a Disciple*, trans. T. Mayer, Cambridge 2003, xix. For al-Ghazali, there was no question of reconciling sufism with Islamic orthodoxy, since to do so would have meant that sufism would first have had to break away from it, and the reality was that it was woven within its fabric. Had it not been so then the Hanbalis, the sternest of guardians of orthodoxy, would never have allowed it to pass. The Hanbali creed may have been a literalist one, but it was not anti-sufi. Particular sufis could be criticised by all means, but, thanks to al-Ghazali, not the path itself.
27 The Sunni Revival spread very rapidly, reaching the Almoravids who conquered Morocco and part of Algeria and southern Spain at the end of the eleventh century. Indeed by the mid-twelfth century, hardly any North African scholar of note was not familiar with the works of al-Ghazali and many could claim to be students of his followers. Special mention should be made of Abu Madyan, a seminal figure of sufism in Muslim Spain and Africa during this period. For an introduction to Abu Madyan and sufism in North Africa during this period, see V. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan*, Cambridge 1996.
28 Makdisi, *Sunni Revival*, 161.

Chapter 2 The Turning of the Tide

1 M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus 1190–1350*, Cambridge 1994, 37.
2 R. Irwin, 'Islam and the Crusades 1096–1699', in J. Riley-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, Oxford 1999, 214.
3 Al-Jahiz, *Manqib al-Turk*, partial trans. C. Harley-Walker as 'Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath ibn Khaqan on the exploits of the Turks and the army of the Khilafat in general', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1915), 670.
4 Chamberlain, op. cit., 47.
5 Ibid., 43.
6 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 31.
7 In this book the terms crusaders and Franks will be used interchangeably.
8 Although historians all agree that the political fragmentation of Syria helped the crusaders greatly, Hillenbrand adds a provocative question of whether the Europeans had been briefed that this was the perfect moment to pounce. Unfortunately, she concludes, 'There is little evidence on this in the Islamic sources, but seldom has the arm of coincidence been longer' (Hillenbrand, op. cit., 33).

9 P.K. Hitti, *History of Syria*, London 1951, 589.

10 H. Dajani-Shakeel, 'Diplomatic relations between Muslim and Frankish rulers 1097–1153', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth Century Syria*, Leiden 1993, 192.

11 The Kingdom of Jerusalem, the County of Tripoli, the Principality of Antioch and the County of Edessa.

12 Ridwan's rule in Aleppo, for example, coincided with the arrival of the First Crusade on the Syrian coast, but not once did he confront them in battle. Rather, his sole concern was the preservation of his sovereignty, a task which he was prepared to complete with the aid of the Franks themselves.

13 Of the forces sent out by the Seljuqs, the best that can be said of them was that their aim was unclear; were the armies sent intended to drive the Franks out of Syria, or were they dispatched – as suspicious Syrian amirs believed – to establish the sultan's control over the land? The result was predictable. When, in 1111, Mawdud marched his army to Aleppo, he found that Ridwan was unwilling to let his forces into the city. A few years later, in 1115, the Seljuq sultan sent another campaign into Syria and this time the rulers of Aleppo and Damascus decided to side with the Franks against it.

14 S. Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, London 1985, 95–6.

15 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 21.

16 R. Smail, *Crusading Warfare 1097–1193*, Cambridge 1956, 22–3.

17 Atabeg is a Turkish word which means father/leader. Effectively an atabeg was a guardian who assumed power when a Seljuq prince died leaving an heir who was a minor. In reality the young seljuq prince became a puppet and the atabeg did not relinquish his position of power. In the words of Irwin, an atabeg was a sort of 'military nanny' to the under-aged seljuq prince (Irwin, op. cit., 215).

18 D. Patton, 'A history of atabegs of Mosul and their relations with the ulama', unpublished dissertation, New York University 1982, 1.

19 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 112.

20 Ibid., 114.

21 See V. Minorsky, 'Prehistory of Saladin', in *Studies in Caucasian History*, London 1953, 133.

22 Ibid., p. 133.

23 Quoted in M. Lyons and D. Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of Holy War*, Cambridge 1982, 4.

24 Minorsky, op. cit., 133.

25 N. Elisseeff, *Nur ad-Din: Un grand Prince Musulman de Syrie au temps des croisades*, Damascus 1967, vol. 2, 673.

26 D. Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships*, Jerusalem 1999, 278.

27 Hodgson, op. cit., 46.

28 G. Leiser, 'Notes on the madrasa in medieval Islamic society', *The Muslim World*, LXXVI (January 1986), 16 (*MW*).

29 Thirty-eight madrasas are documented in Nishapur, which pre-date the Nizamiyya, though none of them survive.

30 Ahmed Fikry, *Masajid al-Qahira wa Madarisuha* (The Mosques and Madrasas of Cairo), 2 vols, Cairo 1965–9.

31 Y. Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*, Pennsylvania 1997, 125.

32 R. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, Edinburgh 1994, 190.

33 R.S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, New York 1977, 377.

34 Hodgson, op. cit., 46.

35 C. Klausner, *The Seljuk Vezirate: A Study of Civil Administration, 1055–1194*, Cambridge MA 1973, 70.

36 Leiser, op. cit., 18.

37 Hodgson, op. cit., 48.

38 While a scholar's prime concern – indeed the measure of his reputation – was the gathering of knowledge ('ilm), for many the gathering of 'ilm became a means to attain high office, a salary and potentially a position of power. In short, knowledge became a means to an end. Although this was, of course, a gradual process which did not crystallise until the Ottoman period, and the creation of a hierarchy and an administrative process of promotion and advancement, the seeds had been sown.

39 In one case a qadi from the al-Damaghani family resigned from his position as qadi and accepted a position as court chamberlain, a position which was normally reserved for military officials. It was certainly not uncommon to find ulama accepting government positions on the condition that they received no payment or that they did not have to attend court. The famous vizier Ibn Hubayra, for example, returned the gifts that were sent to him by the caliph, and Ibn Shuja al-Rudhrawari only agreed to serve in a government position if he received no payment for any judicial rulings and that he was not obliged to alter his dress.

40 The city was now ruled by his son Saif al-Din, but the powers behind the throne in Mosul were al-Jawad, one of Zengi's leading administrators, and Ali Kujik, an amir. Ali Kujik undertook the building of a madrasa, which was the first to be built since the Nizamiyya 50 years previously. What is fascinating about this madrasa is that it was open for Hanafis and Shafiis equally, the first such dual madrasa ever.

41 N. Elisseeff, 'Un Document contemporain de Nur al-Din, sa notice biographique par Ibn Asakir', *Bulletin des etudes orientales*, 13 (1949–51), 155–96.

42 J. Philips, 'The Latin East 1098–1187', in J. Riley-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, Oxford 1999, 122.

43 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 122.

44 Ibid., 118–19.

45 For a complete list of madrasas and a breakdown of their location and madhadhib, see Elisseeff, *Nur ad-Din: Un grand prince*, vol. 3, 914.

Chapter 3 The Young Saladin

1 J. Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Amsterdam 1979, 40.
2 P. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades: The near East from the eleventh century to 1517*, London 1986, 43.
3 Newby, op. cit., 32.
4 B. Lewis, 'The use by Muslim historians of non-Muslim sources', in B. Lewis and P.M. Holt (eds), *Historians of the Middle East*, London 1962, 181.
5 Inkitar (English), Alman (German), Faransis (French), Banadiqa (Venetians) and so forth.
6 E. Sivan, *L'Islam et le Croisade*, Paris 1968, 205–6.
7 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 420.
8 Five Shafii madrasas, five Hanafi madrasas and one Sufi hospice were constructed.
9 The ratio of more than two to one continued through Saladin and the Ayyubid's time so that, by the end of the Ayyubids, Damascus had 89 madrasas whereas Aleppo had only 45.
10 J. Gilbert, 'The ulama of medieval Damascus and the international world of scholarship', unpublished dissertation, University of California 1977, 65–6 (henceforth thesis).
11 S. Humphreys, *Politics and Architectural Patronage in Ayyubid Damascus. Essays in Honour of Bernard Lewis: The Islamic World*, Princeton 1989, 166. Remarkably in the century between 1150 and 1250, no less than 57 out of the 113 known Shafii and Hanafi professors in Aleppo were first- or second-generation immigrants from Iran and Iraq. It is equally interesting to note that the number of scholars resident in Damascus during the thirteenth century was double the number present during the twelfth century.
12 The first was the madrasa built by Saif al-Din Ghazi in Mosul between 1146 and 1149.
13 Hillenbrand, op. cit., 111.
14 Ibid., 72.
15 Al-Sulami, *Kitab al-Jihad*, in E. Sivan, 'La genes de la contre-croisade: un traite Damasquin du debut XIIe siecle', *Journal Asiatique*, XXLIV (1966), 207.
16 Ibid., 216.
17 Ibid., 220.
18 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 73.
19 Ibid., 82.
20 Elisseeff, undocument contemporain, 167.
21 Quoted in Irwin, op. cit., 223.
22 Ibid., 226.
23 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 151.

24 Nothing symbolised this ambition more than the minbar (pulpit) which he ordered to be constructed so as to be placed in the Aqsa mosque. Commissioned in 1168, it was completed in Aleppo. In fact this minbar marks the peak of creativity of the Aleppo school of woodcarvers. The pulpit remained in Aleppo and Ibn Jubayr saw it in 1182, for it was not Nur al-Din's destiny to see it installed in Jerusalem. Twenty years would pass until 1187, when Saladin conquered Jerusalem and sought a more impressive minbar in the Aqsa to mark his triumph. He recalled Nur al-Din's pulpit and had it brought over from Aleppo and installed, where it remained in the Aqsa mosque until it was destroyed by a fanatic in 1969.
25 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 3.
26 Quoted in Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 3.
27 Hodgson, op. cit., 452.
28 Ibid., 452.
29 Even the structure of the maqama itself would send frissons of anticipation as to how far the narrator would go. Nearly every story began with the sentence 'Isa Ibn Hisham narrated to us, saying . . .', which the audience did not need telling was a parody of the chain of authorities on which Islamic tradition relates the sayings of the Prophet. The parody was, of course, magnified by the fact that hero of the maqama was a rogue who earned his living through his wit and cunning.
30 On al-Wahrani see K. Zakharia, 'Al-Wahrani, auteur de Maqamas', *Arabica*, 49/1 (Dec. 2002).
31 Quoted in Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 119.
32 Ibid., 372.
33 Ibid., 118.
34 S. Mustafa, *Salah ud-Din al-Faris al-Mujahid wa'l Malik al-Zahid al-muftari alaihi*, Damascus 2003, 52.
35 Ibid., 55.
36 It is largely thanks to the biography of Ibn Shaddad that we are afforded glimpses of the personal side of Saladin. Although he did not enter his service until 1188 as Saladin's qadi to the army, Ibn Shaddad, who was a product the madrasas rapidly proliferating across the Muslim world, barely left Saladin's side and remained in his household until Saladin's death.
37 M. Lings, *What is Sufism?* London 1975, 111. Lings has added that no one had exercised in person a spiritual influence of such a far-reaching dimension as al-Jilani.
38 M. Kailani, *Hakadha dhahara jil Salah ud-Din was hakadha adapt al-Quds*, Dar al-Qalam UAE 2002, 184.
39 Al-Jilani was initiated at the hands of the Hanbali sufi Abu as-Sad al-Mukharrimi (d. 1119). Interestingly, al-Jilani initially received a frosty reception from other sufis because of his background as a jurist, but he always believed that a knowledge of fiqh and sufism was crucial.

40 The example of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb is a good one of how far al-Jilani's influence spread. Born in Seville, Abu Madyan travelled extensively and is said to have met al-Jilani in Mecca. Abu Madyan recognised him as the qutb and was initiated by him. Abu Madyan then returned to the West, where he spent his remaining years in Algeria.
41 Nur al-Din, for example, built a madrasa in Harran for Asad Ibn al-Manja Ibn Barkat, who was a disciple of al-Jilani, as well as for Qutb al-Din al-Nishapuri himself.
42 C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn Arabi*, Cambridge 1993, 185.
43 Of course the relationship was not without its tensions and misunderstandings; witness Saladin's order, following pressure from the ulama, to execute the Sufi al-Suhrawardi in 1191.
44 Addas, op. cit., 185.
45 Ibid., 185.
46 J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, Princeton 1992, 180.
47 Ibid., 211.
48 Mustafa, op. cit., 41.

Chapter 4 The Battle for Egypt

1 Runciman, op. cit., 363.
2 B. Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs*, Cambridge 2000, 63.
3 D. Ayalon, 'Egypt as a Dominant Factor in Syria and Palestine during the Islamic Period', in A. Cohen and G. Baer (eds), *Egypt and Palestine: A Millennium of Association, 868–1948*, New York 1984, 31.
4 Ibid., 32.
5 Ibid., 24 and 25.
6 Runciman, op. cit., 373.
7 Al-Wahrani, quoted in Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 6.
8 G. Leiser, 'The restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasa and Mudarrisun 495-647/1101-1249', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 1976, 110 (henceforth thesis).
9 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 45.
10 A. Ehrenkreutz, 'The Fatimids in Palestine – the unwitting promoters of the Crusades', in A. Cohen and G. Baer (eds), *Egypt and Palestine: A Millennium of Association, 868–1948*, New York 1984, 72.
11 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 46.
12 Y. Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Leiden 1991, 140.
13 S. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Berkeley 1967, vol. 2, 278–81.

14 Leiser, thesis, 106.
15 The first Sunni madhab to take root in Egypt was the Maliki one, which remained unrivalled until the arrival of Imam Shafii in Egypt in 814. Rapidly his madhab grew and it is reported that in 938 the Malikis and the Shafiis each had 15 circles of students in the mosque of Amr ibn al-As, the oldest mosque in Egypt and a bastion of Sunnism, while the Hanafis only had three.
16 Leiser, thesis, 119.
17 Quoted in Leiser, thesis, 117.
18 Mention briefly should be made of a meeting between al-Turtushi and al-Ghazali in Alexandria, when the latter travelled to the city. Both men intriguingly were born in the same year, one in Tus, the other in Tortossa. Both studied law and travelled extensively, and both settled in Damascus, where they dwelled in a sufi khanaqah. The meeting was brief and not cordial and al-Turtushi later found time to criticise the writings of al-Ghazali, a criticism which was perhaps borne out of envy towards his more illustrious visitor.
19 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 13.
20 G. Leiser, 'The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: the case of Egypt', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, XXII (1985), 30 (henceforth *JARCE*).
21 R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, Harvard 1979, 93.
22 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 43–4.
23 Leiser, *JARCE*, 32.
24 D. Ephrat, 'Muslim reaction to the Frankish presence in Bilad al-Sham', *Al-Masaq*, 15/1 (March 2003); and B. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission, European Approaches Towards the Muslims*, Princeton 1984.
25 Leiser, *JARCE*, 32.
26 Once again, however, the actions of the caliph al-Hafiz raised the suspicions of the Sunni community; he declared a state funeral and ordered the government ministries to close for three days in mourning. He then followed Bahram's coffin, covered with brocade, on a mule until the funeral cortege had reached the burial place. There the caliph dismounted, sat on the edge of the tomb and wept profusely. For the watching Muslims, such an unprecedented show of public emotion was shocking, particularly so since, in their eyes, it clearly demonstrated the favour which the caliph showed to the Christians.
27 Leiser, *JARCE*, 38.
28 One should not be surprised to read that al-Silafi studied at the Nizamiyya in Baghdad, after which he travelled the Islamic world for the next 12 years gathering hadith, before arriving in Alexandria on his way to North Africa and Spain. In fact he was never again to leave Egypt.
29 Leiser, thesis, 158.
30 Ibid., 101.
31 Quoted in Kailani, op. cit., 33.

32 Ibid., 33.
33 Ibid., 236.
34 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 6–29.
35 On Shirkuh writing to Abbasid caliph, see Elisseeff, *Nur ad Din: Un grand prince*, vol. 2, 603.
36 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 10.
37 A sign of the respect that Saladin had for Ibn Masal was the fact that he ordered that payments that Ibn Masal had arranged to be made to certain people should continue after his death.
38 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 19.

Chapter 5 The Unlikely Vizier

1 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 50.
2 Ibid., 57.
3 H. Gibb, 'The armies of Saladin', *Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne*, III (May 1951), 304.
4 Elisseeff, *Nur ad-Din: Un grand prince*, vol. 2, 635.
5 Y. Lev, *Saladin in Egypt*, Brill 1999, 48.
6 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 25.
7 Runciman, op. cit., 369.
8 Ibid., 383.
9 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 31.
10 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 67.
11 Ibid., 67.
12 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 28.
13 Ibid., 31.
14 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 607.
15 See also Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, 'Al-Qadi al-Fadil: his life and political career', unpublished doctorate dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972.
16 Al-Qadi al-Fadil rarely left Egypt and only on trips in the service of Saladin or on pilgrimage.
17 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 56.
18 Dajani-Shakeel, op. cit., 31.
19 Ibid., 34.
20 Ibid., 46.
21 Lev, *Saladin in Egypt*, 18.
22 Ibid., 66–76.
23 Ibid., 73.
24 Ibid., 69.
25 Ibid., 76.
26 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 67.

Chapter 6 Master of Egypt

1 D. Jackson, '1193–1993: An Appreciation of the career of Saladin', in U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (eds) *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, Leuven 1995, 221.
2 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 69.
3 Jackson, op. cit., 225.
4 Quoted in Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 65.
5 Ibid., 44.
6 Ibid., 35.
7 Ibid., 36.
8 Ayyub was granted the iqta of the delta – Alexandria, Damietta and the Buhayrah province – while Turan Shah held the iqta of the upper Egyptian provinces of Qus and Aswan.
9 See Y. Tabba, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival*, Seattle 2001, 30.
10 Ibid., 50.
11 For the impact of the Sunni Revival on other forms of Islamic art and in particular the stalactite or honeycomb vaulting, see Tabba, op. cit., 129–33.
12 Ibid., 68.
13 Others counted among the alumni of al-Silafi were the secretary of the Diwan of al-Insha, Ibn al-Jarrah, who died in Damietta in 1219 during the crusader attack on the city; the minister of the army, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who held the ministry under the last Fatimid viziers and Saladin for some 20 years until his death in 1188; and the historian Ibn Mammati, who was placed in charge of all the ministries under Saladin. Another person of note was Abul Fadail al-Qasim al-Shahrazuri. Born in Mosul, he studied in the Nizamiyya, where he was a close companion of Imad al-Din al-Isfahani. He then went to Egypt to be in the services of Saladin and where he studied under al-Silafi. He succeeded his uncle Kamal al-Din as chief qadi of Damascus and later Saladin sent him to the Abbasid court in Baghdad. He was then sent to Mosul where he became qadi al-qudat of that city, for it must be recalled that Mosul was the city of origin of the Sharazuris.
14 Berkey, op. cit., 23.
15 Lev, op. cit., 124.
16 Leiser, thesis, 192.
17 Berkey, op. cit., 24.
18 In addition to the collecting of ijazas, the student also kept a notebook in which he recorded not only when he heard a certain scholar teach a particular lesson (samaat), but also the professors with whom he studied (mujam al-mashyakha). This was crucial to verify one's position in the chain of authorities.
19 Gilbert, thesis, 19.
20 Ibid., 21.

Chapter 7 The Prize of Syria

1 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 194.
2 Ehrenkreutz, op. cit., 107.
3 Ibid., 72.
4 Gibb, 'The achievement of Saladin', 44–60.
5 Ehrenkreutz, op. cit., 238.
6 Jackson, op. cit., 220.
7 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 156.
8 Jackson, op. cit., 220.
9 Mustafa, op. cit., 152.
10 Runciman, op. cit., 400.
11 Ibid., 405.
12 J. Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1174–1277*, London 1973, 103.
13 Hamilton, op. cit., 66.
14 R. Smail, *The Crusaders in Syria and the Holy Land*, London 1973, 21.
15 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 88–9.
16 Ibid., 92–3.
17 Ibid., 97.
18 D. Richards, 'Imad al Din al-Isfahani, administrator, litterateur and historian', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth Century Syria*, Leiden 1993, 138.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 145.
21 Al-Wahrani, quoted in Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 59.
22 Runciman, op. cit., 414.

Chapter 8 The Meddlesome Priest: Saladin and al-Khabushani

1 Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, ed. W. Wright, Gibb Memorial Series, London 1907, vol. 5, 22–3.
2 Leiser, thesis, 234.
3 Berkey, op. cit., 4.
4 Leiser, *JARCE*, 42.
5 G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, Edinburgh 1981, 36.
6 It should be noted that once the waqf was created, the founder could no longer change its terms.
7 Leiser, Notes on the Madrasa, 19.
8 Berkey, op. cit., 57.
9 Leiser, thesis, 265.

10 Ibid., 421.
11 Ibid., 283.
12 Lev, *Saladin in Egypt*, 128.
13 S. Humphreys, 'Women as patrons of religious architecture in Ayyubid Damascus', *Muqarnas* 11 (1994), 35.
14 Berkey, op. cit., 55.
15 Humphreys, op. cit., 36.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid, 42.
18 Makdisi, op. cit., 39.
19 The Diwan al-Ahbas (diwan of religious endowments), which had jurisdiction over the administration and maintenance of religious and educational institutions, was established as an independent diwan and was placed under the supervision of al-Qadi al-Fadil.
20 Leiser, *JARCE*, 45.
21 Ibid., 46.
22 Lev, op. cit., 77.
23 Berkey, op. cit., 8.
24 C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton 1981, 344–89.
25 Leiser, *JARCE*, 46–7.
26 Gilbert, thesis, 211.
27 Ibid., 213.
28 Gilbert also notes that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the number of mosques in Damascus requiring a khatib increased from one to nine.
29 Leiser, Notes on the Madrasa, 22.
30 Ibid., 23.
31 J.W.G. Wiet, *History of Mankind*, vol. 3 *The Great Medieval Civilizations*, UNESCO 1975, 458.

Chapter 9 Saladin and the Leper King

1 Hamilton, op. cit., 106.
2 Ibid., 111.
3 Ibid., 122.
4 Ibid., 124.
5 Ibid., 131.
6 Smail, op. cit., 92–3.
7 Runciman, op. cit., 417.
8 Smail, op. cit., 66–7.
9 Ibid., 139.
10 D. Nicolle, *The Third Crusade 1191*, Oxford 2005, 38.

11 Smail, op. cit., 154.
12 Ibid., 150.
13 Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 52.
14 Runciman, op. cit., 419.
15 Hamilton, op. cit., 149.
16 Lyons & Jackson, op. cit., 149.
17 Ibid., 160.
18 A. Ehrenkreutz, 'The place of Saladin in the naval history of the Mediterranean Sea', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75 (1955), 100–16.
19 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 170.
20 Ibid., 171.
21 Ibid., 176.
22 Smail, op. cit., 178.
23 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 188.
24 Hamilton, op. cit., 181.
25 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 200.
26 R. Nicholson, *Joscelyn III and the Fall of the Crusader States 1134–1199*, Leiden 1973, 109.

Chapter 10 Sailing Close to Disaster: Saladin's Illness at Harran

1 Riley-Smith, op. cit., 106.
2 P. Edbury, 'Propaganda and faction in the Kingdom of Jerusalem: the background to Hattin', in M. Shatzmiller (ed.), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-century Syria*, Leiden 1993, 178.
3 Hamilton, op. cit., 197.
4 J. Folda, 'The tomb of King Baldwin IV', in *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land 1098–1187*, Cambridge 1995, 461.
5 Riley-Smith, op. cit., 105.
6 Newby, op. cit., 104.
7 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 239.
8 Humphreys, op. cit., 58.
9 For an analysis of the succession of Guy of Lusignan, see Hamilton, op. cit., 220–34.
10 Hamilton, op. cit., 223.
11 Ibid., 224.
12 G. Regan, *Lionhearts: Saladin and Richard I*, London 1998, 65.
13 See B. Hamilton, 'The elephant of Christ: Reynald of Chatillon', *Studies in Church History*, 15 (1978), 97–108.
14 Hamilton, *The Leper King*, 226.
15 Edbury, op. cit., 187.

Chapter 11 Victory at Hattin

1 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 253.
2 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 179.
3 Regan, op. cit., 72.
4 H. Mayer, 'Henry II of England and the Holy Land', *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), 736.
5 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 260–1.
6 Regan, op. cit., 83.
7 Ibid., 87.
8 Ibid.
9 D. Nicolle, *Hattin 1187, Saladin's Greatest Victory*, Oxford 1993, 88.
10 Regan, op. cit., 90.

Chapter 12 The Return of Jerusalem

1 H. Gibb, 'The rise of Saladin, 1169–1189', in K. Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, Philadelphia 1958, vol. 1, 563–89.
2 Regan, op. cit., 93.
3 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 188.
4 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 299.
5 Ibn Shaddad, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, trans. D. Richards, Aldershot 2002, 2.
6 Ibid., 2.

Chapter 13 The Arrival of Richard

1 Regan, op. cit., 112.
2 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 281.
3 As well as with those of Jazirat Umar, Diyar Bakr and Mardin.
4 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 290.
5 Ibid., 292.
6 Ibid., 294.
7 Regan, op. cit., 119.
8 C. Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*, London 2006, 409.
9 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 311.
10 Regan, op. cit., 133.
11 Lyons and Jackson, op. cit., 337.
12 Ibid., 338.

Chapter 14 A Bitter Siege of Attrition: Saladin, Richard and Jerusalem

1 Humphreys, op. cit., 65.
2 Newby, op. cit., 165.
3 Regan, op. cit., 204.
4 Gibb, 'The rise of Saladin', 563–89.

Chapter 15 Death in Damascus: Saladin's Last Days

1 Humphreys, op. cit., 87.
2 C. Cahen, 'Turkish invasion', in K. Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, Wisconsin 1969–74, vol. 1, 176.
3 Gibb, 'The achievement of Saladin', 44–60.
4 Humphreys, op. cit., 377.
5 Ibid., 32.
6 Ibid., 37.
7 Ibid., 34.
8 Ibid., 33.
9 Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin*, 237.
10 Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom*, 195.
11 C. Hillenbrand, op. cit., 2.
12 Gibb, 'The achievement of Saladin', 44–60.

A Note on the Arabic Sources

One has to agree with Gibb that historians who have studied the life of Saladin have given the first place to two Arabic sources; the biography of Saladin by Ibn Shaddad and the Universal History of Ibn al-Athir. Ibn Shaddad offers us the most personal insight into Saladin's life, even though he did not join his service, as judge of the army, until 1188 when Saladin was already at the height of his power. Nevertheless from that moment on, apart from a brief period, Ibn Shaddad did not leave Saladin's side. There can be no doubt that he was a great admirer of Saladin and one keeps that in mind as one reads Ibn Shaddad's writings. Clearly the fact that Ibn Shaddad did not – apart from two occasions – come into contact with Saladin prior to 1188 effectively meant that for the period up till then he relied on second hand reports.

The sympathetic portrayal of Saladin that one finds in Ibn Shaddad is in sharp contrast to the bias that one reads in Ibn al-Athir. Although there is no evidence that the two men met, there is a clear explanation for Ibn al-Athir's hostility and that is he was firmly in the Zengid camp and opposed to the Ayyubid Saladin whom the Zengids viewed as a usurper. Ibn al-Athir's admiration for Saladin is grudging and he is quick to find fault. One can give many examples, but one will suffice; when Saladin refused to return to Egypt from Syria as part of Nur al-Din's third campaign, Ibn al-Athir is quick to conclude it was because he was holding out for financial inducements. Certainly in every case where Saladin and Nur al-Din are contrasted, Ibn al-Athir takes the opportunity to darken Saladin's name.

Another invaluable contemporary source which is known to have existed was the writing of Saladin's secretary Imad al-Din al-Isfahani. Imad al-Din had been Saladin's personal secretary since 1175 and certainly his proximity

to and admiration for Saladin was on the same level as that of Ibn Shaddad. What is of particular interest is that Imad al-Din also served Nur al-Din and therefore one is offered an insight into the lives of the two great men of the age.

Imad al-Din's work, al-Barq al-Shami was a seven volume chronicle, appears to have been utilized by practically all other contemporary chroniclers,[1] but although it has been lost, it was abridged by Abu Shama in his work Kitab al-Rawdatain. Al-Barq al-Shami was not the only work which Imad al-Din devoted to Saladin, for he was also the author of al-Fath al-Qussi. Imad al-Din al-Isfahani's appointment as Saladin's personal secretary was largely due to al-Qadi al-Fadil who was Saladin's closest advisor and a man who exerted tremendous influence over him and we are indebted to Lyons and Jackson for the work they did in making available some of the letters – both personal and those drafted in Saladin's name – which demonstrate clearly the considerable influence that he had over Saladin.

[1] H. Gibb, 'al-Barq al-Shami': The History of Saladin by the Katib Imad al-Din al-Isfahani, Wiener Zeitschrift fur die Kunde des Morgenlandes LII, 93.

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Saladin

A. R. Azzam

Saladin was an outsider with a life full of paradoxes. Famed for driving the Crusaders out of Jerusalem, he became the most powerful man in the Islamic Empire. Yet he died penniless, without enough money even to line his coffin.

In this groundbreaking new biography, A. R. Azzam uncovers the real Saladin by placing him in historical context amidst the 10th and 11th century Sunni Revival – the powerful and sweeping intellectual renaissance which would ultimately transform every field of Islamic thought. Azzam contends that Saladin was not the brilliant military commander of popular imagination but that his true greatness lay in his political and spiritual vision.

This book tells his fascinating and complex story.

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